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## Shakespeare's Hand Throughout *Edward III* 1596

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Such topics as Shakespeare's handwriting and spelling remain largely unexplored. No doubt their dauntingly complex variability is regarded as impenetrable. Thus the three-page manuscript insurrection scene in *Sir Thomas More* (hereafter *More*), now generally accepted as Shakespeare holograph, spells 'sheriff' as shreef, shreeve, Shreiff, Shreue and Shrieue, all within five lines, and 'country' as Countrie, Country and Countrey, within two, while the hero is introduced as moo, moor and moore as well as more. But such myriad-mindedness was surely innate and ubiquitous; and in fact many early Shakespeare publications contain comparable eccentricities of spelling and capitalisation, which can hardly have been added by anyone else. Many of them, therefore, must have been printed from authorial copy.

The latest candidate is the 1622 first edition of *Othello*,<sup>1</sup> about which Professor Honigmann rhetorically enquires 'how many other writers shared Shakespeare's preference for *shew*, *vertue* and *sence*' together with the 85 other words and five categories also specified.

The writer of *Edward III*, for one. Its 1596 first edition has 'vertue' or 'vertuous' eight times all told, and 'shew' nine times out of ten. Even the word 'showers' (= rain) is spelt 'shewers', while 'senseless' appears as 'senceles'. In all, as many as twenty-five *Othello* words as listed by Honigmann also occur in *Edward III* with the same spellings; another six such words are spelt in near-identical forms; and each of Honigmann's five categories (y for modern i, -oo- for -o, in- for en-, -full for -ful, and the doubling of consonants) is also well represented.<sup>2</sup>

No scholar will be surprised at the inference that the Countess scenes of *Edward III* 1596, long accepted as Shakespeare's own work, were set up from copy written in his own hand. But, by the same tokens, so was the rest of the play. This too copiously exemplifies the same five categories; and it contains, in lines sometimes supposed to have been contributed by a 'collaborator', *sixty-one* actual *Othello* spellings of the twenty-five shared words specified above and listed below.<sup>2</sup>

At least it will be conceded, given Shakespeare's demonstrable variability, that his Countess scenes in the latter play will spell the same word in two or more different ways. Examples include anie/any, a side/aside, bid/byd, blood/bloud, collours/coullours, Darby/Derby, die/dye, don/done/donne, doest/dost, eies/eyes, els/else, far/farre, feild/field, flie/fly, foorth/forth, glorie/glorie, gracious/gratious, happie/happy, hart/heart, lustie/lusty, mightie/mighty, mine/myne, of/off, staie/stay, them selues/themselues, time/tyme, tourne/turn, waie/way, war/warre, yong/young. But exactly the same duplicates, without exception, also occur in the supposedly non-Shakespearean lines.

There is further support for the integrity of *Edward III* in its amazing variety of speech-prefixes, again as in the *More* MS; these too occur throughout the former play. All this may well prove identificatory; perhaps Shakespeare's pen habitually exhibited a reasonably constant ratio among words, spellings, occurrences or lines?

The various eccentricities found in *More* have been directly attributed, by accredited specialists, to personal practice - for example the deceptive similarity of certain letters, such as *a* and *u*, or the minim downstrokes, in the formation of which 'Shakespeare must have been more than ordinarily careless'.<sup>3</sup> Here misprints are surely a good guide. Thus *Edward III* 1596 has 'huggard' for 'haggard' (an untrained female hawk), 'said' for 'sand', and (just as in *Othello* 1623) 'game' for 'gaine'. Then *More* also exhibits 'the frequent and whimsical appearance of an initial capital C ...in place of the minuscule' which also characterises the Quartos, and the common use of *y* instead of *i*, with the inference that Shakespeare 'must be an old-fashioned speller'.<sup>4</sup> All such features are readily identifiable throughout *Edward III* 1596, again including scores of examples in lines often treated as unShakespearean. The same applies to actual spellings of words common to *Edward III* and the *More* scene, such as bancke, bin (= been), cost (=coast), Countrie, dogg, graunt, hart (= heart), knyfe, mynd, perceae, rebell, ryot,

saies(t), sett, thancke, thincke, traytor, tyme, whether (= whither), wisdom, youle (=you'll), yf, yt.

Then there are the Oxford English Dictionary's first recorded citations. Their significance, and sometimes their accuracy, have been disputed. But they were compiled from millions of slips sent in by serious researchers, so they have some evidential value; and the OED itself plainly implies that they may well include new coinages. Twenty-two examples predictably occur in the Countess scenes of *Edward III* 1596. But the rest contains *thirty-four*; must they all be supposed to derive from some entirely different unknown source? That seems manifestly implausible, especially when one of them (the use of 'sand' to mean one single grain, OED sb<sup>2</sup> 1e) occurs not only in the Shakespearean Act Two but also in the supposedly non-Shakespearean Act Four.

Further, the OED has decided that in future its dating of known Shakespeare works will (as recommended eight years ago<sup>5</sup>) be based on publication date, as opposed to conjectural composition date. Henceforth, each such work will be assigned a terminus year, whether Shakespeare's own in 1616 or the earlier printed date of publication. Thus *Love's Labour's Lost* will be reclassified to 1598 instead of the present conjectural 1588. *Edward III* 1596 will then take its rightful precedence as the earliest dated source for several additional first citations. Of course some stylometrists may claim that 'a large vocabulary may be seen as denoting mixed rather than single authorship'.<sup>6</sup> Conversely, 'the possession of an unusually large stock of words is a rare and well-marked literary characteristic, unlikely to be common to two dramatic authors of this short period'.<sup>7</sup> If the latter contention is correct, the whole of *Edward III* is *prima facie* Shakespearean; that play has the largest word-stock found among the so-called apocrypha.<sup>8</sup>

One other inference from textual fact may also prove disconcerting: Shakespeare, on this showing, can hardly have been the well-schooled classicist postulated by modern commentators.<sup>10</sup> In *Edward III* Act Two for example he wrote not only 'sence' and 'vertue' but 'carectred', 'Corrall', 'delitious', 'emured', 'mettel', 'perswasieue', 'secred', 'substance', 'vulger', and so forth, in example after example - heedless or unaware of *sensus*, *virtus*, *character*, *coralium*, *deliciae*, *in + murus*, *metallum*, *persuadeo*, *sacer*, *substantia*, *vulgaris*, etc. And since all Tudor schools existed solely in order to inculcate Latin it further follows that Shakespeare was educationally disadvantaged during his Stratford years. That would also explain why Hero's home in Sestos or Sestus is spelt as 'Cestus', Scythian as 'Sythian' and Sicily as 'Cycelie'.

Similar analyses of plays universally agreed to have been printed from his own copy in his own lifetime, such as *Love's Labour's Lost* Q1 1598 and *Hamlet* Q2 1604-5, show the selfsame characteristics in comparable profusion. So does *2 Henry IV* 1600, which contains the curious *More* spelling of 'scilens' (=silence). So do the *Sonnets*<sup>9</sup> 1609; so do so-called 'reconstructions',<sup>10</sup> such as *Contention* 1594 and *True Tragedy* 1595; so do other so-called apocrypha, such as *King Leir* 1605; so does *Edmund Ironside* c.1588. But each of these demonstrations will require separate detailed treatment.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, academic specialists should think twice before explaining stylistic discontinuities by reference to such unevincenced entities as collaborators, memorising actors, compositors, copyists, authors of old source-plays, plagiarists or indeed anything and everything except the predictable development and multifariousness of Shakespeare himself.

Instead, despite all the undoubted difficulties, the data of vocabulary, spelling and handwriting would surely constitute suitable topics for twenty-first century research, in the age of modern word-processing and other computable technologies. Such evidence is after all verifiably factual, not merely hypothetical.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> E. A. J. Honigmann, *The Texts of 'Othello' and Shakespearean Revision*, 1996, 158-160.

<sup>2</sup> 1. bataille (also batailles), 2. battell (also battells), 3. cald (=called), 4. comming, 5. desteny, 6. deusion, 7. Epithites, 8. grone (also grones, groning), 9. intirely, 10. (a)lowd, 11. Lyon (also Lyons), 12. moouing, 13. a peece (=apiece), also a peeces (= to pieces) and peecemeale, 14. pittying, 15. prooue, 16. prophane, 17. sence, 18. shew (also shewed, shewes, shewers), 19. Souldiers (also souldiers), 20. stroake, 21. subbornation, 22. suddaine, 23. tearme (also tearmes), 24. vertue (also vertues, vertuous), 25. warrior (also warriors). Near-identical spellings include bould (and cf. hould, ould), clyme and clymd, ey, humaine, Ile (=isle), ly and

lye (tell untruths), for Q *Othello's* fould (=fold), clime (=climb), eyd (=eyed), humane (=human), Ilanders (=islanders), lyer (=liar) releuee (for beleuee) . In addition to 8 above, *Edward III* contains nine other examples of medial -o- for modern -oa- and seven examples of the converse in addition to 20 above. As to Honigmann's general categories: in *Edward III*, y for modern i occurs one hundred and thirty-seven times, oo for o eleven times in addition to 12 and 15 above, in- for en- appears on twenty-eight occasions as well as example 9 above, (cf. also im- for em-), there are twenty-seven words that end in -full (e.g. beautifull) instead of modern -ful, and there are eighty-eight instances of other doubled consonants (as in 21 above). Such spellings occur throughout *Edward III*, both in the Shakespearean Act Two as accepted by the recent Cambridge edition (Melchiori 1998, 14) and also in the rest of the play as attributed to Shakespeare in its entirety (Slater, *The Problem of Edward III* 1988 and Sams, *Shakespeare's Edward III* 1996).

<sup>3</sup> J. D. Wilson, 'Bibliographical Links between the Three Pages and the Good Quartos', pp. 115-8, in *Shakespeare's Hand in the Play of Sir Thomas More*, ed. A.E.Pollard, 1923.

<sup>4</sup> A.E.Pollard, 'Introduction', p. 17, as in note 3 above.

<sup>5</sup> E. Sams, 'Shakespeare and the Oxford Imprint', *Times Literary Supplement*, 6 March 1992, 13.

<sup>6</sup> T. Merriam, 'Influence Alone? Reflections on the Newly Canonised *Edward, III*', *N&Q* ccxliii, June 1999, 201.

<sup>7</sup> A. Hart, *Shakespeare and the Homilies*, 1934, 223.

<sup>8</sup> L. Ule, *A Concordance to the Shakespeare Apocrypha*, 1987, III 1486. The next largest is that of *Edmund Ironside*.

<sup>9</sup> most recently in J. Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare*, 1997, 8-10, and P. Honan, *Shakespeare: A Life*, 1998, 45-58.

<sup>10</sup> not only in the spellings already described but also in the curious phenomenon of a printed 'their' instead of a written 'thy', as discussed by G. Blakemore Evans (*Riverside Shakespeare* 2/1997, 1770). He attributes these vagaries to a hypothetical 'scribe'; but a much more economical explanation is the quirkiness of Shakespeare's own hand.

<sup>11</sup> A start has already been made: see E. Sams, 'Shakespeare's Hand in the Copy for the 1603 First Quarto of *Hamlet*', *Hamlet Studies* 20 (Summer and Winter 1998).