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Shakespeare's Spelling

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The *Riverside Shakespeare* (2/1997) treats *King Lear* 1608 as a mere memorial reconstruction compiled by traitor-actors and sold to a duped public by an unscrupulous printer as a genuine Shakespeare play. But it *is* one, said the *Oxford Shakespeare* (1986-88).

For *Riverside*, again, *Edward III* 1598 was a collaboration between Shakespeare and some unknown playwright. For the *Oxford* editors, however, it was probably the work of one single hand, namely Shakespeare's; they regretted its omission.

Both these collected editions include Shakespeare's manuscript scene of rebellion in *Sir Thomas More*; yet they both devalue it with such phrases as 'if it is indeed his'.

In all three instances, therefore, some of our best-informed authorities are quite incapable of distinguishing gems from paste.

This article agrees with earlier experts¹ in classifying the *More* scene as undoubtable (if undatable) Shakespeare, written in his hand. That acceptance affords a modern method of determining the authenticity of *King Lear* 1608 and *Edward III* 1598.

As Dover Wilson said in 1923, the old-fashioned Shakespearean spellings found in *More* might well crop up in his full-length plays. And he famously found a few (such as 'scilens') in what he called the Good Quartos.²

But he never looked at *Edward III* 1598, no part of which was then attributed to Shakespeare. The pendulum of scholarly consensus has now swung back again; and this essay identifies scores of spelling parallels between the *More* scene and that five-act play. There they all occur in one single dated text, not just somewhere among fifteen separate quartos printed by a dozen different presses after correction by a score of nameless compositors during some thirty years.

The *More* manuscript tells us that Shakespeare composed in a secretary hand that was old-fashioned in its orthography and could be misleading in its letter-formation. Among its main characteristics are its frequent use of y instead of modern i, and its total absence of apostrophes. Amazingly, the 1923 analysis of its spellings³ fails to mention either of these obvious facts. But the 1598 printing of *Edward III* is crammed with such y-spellings, often in the selfsame words, such as knyfe, myndes, ryot, syt, traytor, tymes, yf, yt; and it contains not a single apostrophe throughout its five acts.

There are many other parallels between *More* and *Edward III*. The following list (which is far from exhaustive) contains, between semicolons, either a shared departure from the expected form or else the *More* spelling and then, after a solidus, an *Edward III* equivalent. Square brackets enclose explanations, round brackets definitions.

(1) adicion [addition]/condicion (ici = iti); (2) adicion/ods (single d); (3) advauntage, Comaund, graunt/vauntage, commaund, graunt (au = a); (4) afoord/of [off] (single f); (5) afoord/beloooued (oo = o); (6) appostle/lippes (double p); (7) appropriat, desperat/ contemplat,

¹e.g. in Shakespeare's Hand in the Play of Sir Thomas More: Papers by Alfred W. Pollard, W. W. Greg, E. Maunde Thompson, J. Dover Wilson & R. W. Chambers with the text of the III May Day Scenes edited by W. W. Greg, Cambridge 1923.

² namely *Venus and Adonis* 1593, *The Rape of Lucrece* 1594, *Richard II* 1597, *Love's Labour's Lost* 1598, *1 Henry IV* 1598, *Romeo and Juliet* 1599, *The Merchant of Venice* 1600, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1600, *Much Ado about Nothing* 1600, *2 Henry IV* 1600, *Hamlet* 1603, *King Lear* 1608, *Troilus and Cressida* 1608, *Sonnets* and *A Lover's Complaint* 1609, *Othello* 1622. It will be noted that neither *King Lear* 1608, nor any part of *Richard II* (pace *Riverside* 2/1977), nor *Richard III* 1597 (pace both *Riverside* and *Oxford* 1986-8) had then been classified as memorial reconstructions. Wilson however omitted *Titus Andronicus* 1594 and *Richard III* as supposedly 'suspect', for undefined reasons.

³ op. cit.; J. Dover Wilson, pp. 132-141

excommunicat, passionat (final e omitted after terminal -at); (8) insolenc, obedienc/recompenc, and cf. also present as a misprint for presence, which suggests that the spelling which confronted the compositors was presenc, and that the final c was misread as t (final e omitted after terminal c; (9) banck, thanck, thinck/bancke, thancke, thinck (nck = nk); (10) bin [been]; (11) braule (au = aw); (12) comaund (single m); (13) clothd, pleasd, quelld, sufferd, sylenct, topt/breathd, aduisd, fild, conquerd, disgrast, cropt, etc. (shortened past tenses); (14) cost [coast] (o = oa); (15) City, Country (with capital C, whatever the spelling); (16) Chartered, Chidd, Cannot, Come/Champion [adj.], Chesse, Circle, Country [adj.] (other curious C-capitalisations, including verbs and adjectives); (17) dogges (double g); (18) enstalls/enformd (en = in); (19) geat [get]/least [lest] (ea = short e); (20) gospell, rebell/Angell, cancell (terminal ell = el); (21) hearing [herring]/hearb [herb] (ear pronounced er); (22) hiddious/meddow (double d); (23) lugage/dragd (single g); (24) mas [mass]/glas (single terminal s); (25) obay/pray [prey] (ay = ey); (26) on [one], sinn/ don, gon, wonn (final e omitted after n); (27) perceau (ea = ei); (28) prentizes/cowardize (z = sibilant); (29) quallify/allarum (double l); (30) saies [says] (ie = y); (31) stilnes/boldnes (nes = ness); (32) tane [=taken], then [=than], ther [=there]; (33) tooth [to the]/too [to] (oo = o); (34) trewe/slue [slew] (ewe, ue interchangeable); (35) voyce/choyce; (36) watrie [watery]; (37) whether [whither] youle [you'll]; (38) yf; (39) yt; (40) aucthoryty/Poyctiers, fructfull (silent c); (41) harber [harbour]/arber [arbour] (er = our).

In this list, types only are cited, not tokens, i.e. actual words not usages. Despite their difference in length, and perhaps date, the *More* episode and the five-act play *Edward III* share not only these profuse resemblances but a general high variability; thus they both spell the same word or speech-prefix in different ways. Only the most striking abnormalities are analysed here; but there are many other parallels, as in the ubiquitous termination -full throughout *Edward III*, which corresponds with the only such ending that occurs in *More* - the word plentyfull, with its typical intrusive y. Further, the many minim errors⁴ visible in *More* are also readily inferable from misprints in *Edward III*, such as game for gaine (as in *Othello* 1622), said for sand and this for thus. Other examples from the play are e/d misprints (beguile for beguuld, lurke for lurkd, Wine for Wind, or o/a misprints (Torter for Tartar, vwarde for vawarde).

All such shared idiosyncrasies occur throughout both texts, not just in those portions of *Edward III* now officially attributed to Shakespeare. So the inference from the facts thus far is that he wrote the whole of this play, which was printed from authorial copy. Why *Edward III*'s compositors allowed so many (and such old-fashioned) idiosyncrasies to pass unchanged into print is a proper topic for further investigation; the *prima facie* answer is that Shakespeare was a well-known writer whose work they had not previously set and were rather reluctant to change.

That reluctance might well have abated by 1608, the publication date of *King Lear*, by which time any y-spellings would have become even more old-fashioned. But that play still contains over sixty of them, including fayth, ryotous, traytor, voyce, all as in *More*, plus coyne, dye, dye, ioyne, loynes, lye, Lyon, noyse, poynt, poyson, prayse, rayle, rayse, spoyle, stayne, trayterous, traytor, all as in *Edward III*.

But the apostrophes so conspicuously absent from the *More* manuscript or the *Edward III* printing proliferate in *King Lear* 1608. So perhaps they derived from some other hand? This may have belonged to one of the traitor-actors who illicitly procured that bogus script for its corrupt publisher. He in turn knowingly misattributed its authorship to Mr. William Shakespeare and its performance to Shakespeare's theatre company, the King's Men. He added the further deliberate lie that this fraudulent text had been performed before the King in question, namely James I of England, who had also been hoodwinked. So had the stage censor who publicly assigned the rights in this same text to the same unscrupulous publisher - who however added his own name and address on all the copies he sold, presumably so that the authorities could easily find and punish him. But all this, *pace* the 1997 *Riverside Shakespeare*, seems somewhat implausible. Another explanation is that if the 1608 *King Lear* was set from Shakespeare's own foul papers, as the *Oxford* editors suggest, then either he himself or the compositors concerned had inserted apostrophes in well over 100 words, including some sixty past tenses. Here are some further *King Lear* spellings (including actual words, as shown) that occur in both *More* and

⁴ i.e. the downstrokes in m, n, u, i, c, r and w, in the formation of which Shakespeare (as *More* shows) was extremely careless when writing at speed.

Edward III, arranged so far as possible in the numbered order listed above. As before, types only are given, not tokens.

(1) addicions, as in *More*; (2) ods, as in *Edward III*; (3) Fraunc[e], as in *More* and commaund as in *Edward III*, together with demaund, graund, launces, traunst; (4) of [off] as in *Edward III*, together with caytife, defuse [diffuse], diferece, mastife, snurfe [snuff]; (5) doo [do], foord, loose [lose], shoos, too [to], Woolfe; (6) *Appollo*, happely [haply]; (7) desperat[ly] as in *More*, remediati; (8) intelligent occurs as a misprint for intelligence, cf. item (8) above; (9) drunckards, Nunckle, stinck, stincking, truncke, twinckled, wrinckles; (10) bin as in *More* and *Edward III*; (11) baud [bawd]; (12) accomodate, comon, comodities, consumation, imediate;⁵ (13) fayth'd, abus'd, cal'd, assur'd, chanc'st, clipt, together with many other examples; (14) borish [boarish], croke [croak], gotish [goatish], lothed [loathed], roring [roaring], tode [toad]; (15) Cities, Countrie and Countries with capitals (cf. both *More* and *Edward III*); (16) Caractar, Catastrophe, Cohorts, Cokney, Comedy, Comrade, Codpeece, Commission, Could, Course; (17) raggs; (18) enform'd as in *Edward III*, entends: (19) fleash [flesh], leachers [lechers], least [lest], as in *Edward III* together with neather [nether], sheald [shelled];⁶ (20) Angell, battell as in *Edward III*, together with brothell, councell, crewell, darnell, dismantell, dungell [dunghill], houell, kenell, mungrell, quarrell; (21) dearn [dern], shepheard, tearmes; (22) shaddow, widdow; (23) bragart, bragd, lugd; (24) addres, kis, redres, trespas; (25) obay, pray [prey]; (26) on [one], gon; (27) seaze, conceaue, leasure, perceaue, receaue; (28) benizon, hiszing; (29) allwaies, lilly, pallaces, sallets [salads]; (30) alwaies, saies, straied, swaies; (31) badnes, briefnes, busines, darkenes, darknes, dumbnes, fitnes, foulnes, gentlenes, greedines, harshnes, lamenes, madnes, mildnes, nakednes, oldnes, plainnes, raggednes, rashnes, tamenes, tardines, weaknes, wretchednes; (32) tane [ta'en], then [than], ther [there], all as in *More* and *Edward III*; (33) tooth [to the] and too [to], again both as in *More* and *Edward III*; (34) crewell dew [due] pue [pew] slue [slew] (as in *Edward III*); (35) voyce as in *More*; (36) watrish [*More* has watrie]; (37) whether [whither], youle [you'll], as in both *More* and *Edward III*.

Items 38-41 are not found in *King Lear* 1608. But there are many other plain parallels between that play and *Edward III* 1598. Thus they both far prefer the termination -full to -ful, as in the only *More* example plentyfull. Again, *More* has ar instead of are; so has *King Lear*, three times, while the modern endings -less and -al, which are not found in *More*, are spelt -les and -all throughout both *Edward III* and *King Lear*. The word Animall is capitalised in that last-named source; and capital letters throughout these three texts suggest that their writers were all using the same system, whereby for example animals and their products are awarded a capital letter, as in Beef and Dung in *More*, Corral and Foxes in *Edward III*, Ciuet and Woolfe in *King Lear*. Of course no such rules are consistently applied, and are in any event varied by capital Cs which are apparently justified solely on grounds of handwriting, e.g. because the writer's small c was insufficiently distinct. But this is how Shakespeare wrote in *More*, and hence no doubt how he wrote elsewhere; and it may well be that a scheme of capitalisation, recognisable though not always observed, could be compiled from his known or inferable practice. That would be another way of identifying his hand; so perhaps would the percentage of variable spellings in printed texts.

So are misprints. In this respect too *King Lear* exhibits the same characteristics as the other two texts; thus its compositor sets heare as heard (d/e), gull as gall (a/u), might as night, sting as stung, this as thus (minim errors) and so forth. If paleography were still a familiar scholarly discipline, these topics would have been more comprehensively analysed, in this computerised age. In fact little attention has been paid to Shakespeare's spellings since Dover Wilson in 1923, apart from Professor Emeritus Ernst Honigmann's recent work on the 1622 Quarto of *Othello*.⁷ He asks, rhetorically, how many other writers shared Shakespeare's preference for shew and vertue and sence and all the other strong or occasional preferences listed above? One answer is the writer of both *Edward III* 1598 and *King Lear* 1608, who often shows such preferences whenever he uses *Othello* words.

⁵ The first two words in item 12 are printed with a bar over the first o, indicating that the following m was to be doubled; no doubt the writer sometimes omitted this sign, as in *More's* Comand and Comaund.

⁶ hence perhaps the persistent and unusual sealf [self] in *More*.

⁷ *The Texts of 'Othello' and Shakespearean Revision* London and New York 1996, especially Appendix C, 'Shakespearian' Spellings in Q *Othello*, pp. 158-161.

So, in even greater measure, does Shakespeare in the second Quarto of *Hamlet*, a text which is generally agreed to have been set up from authorial copy. As Honigmann says, this degree of resemblance to *Othello* 1622 cannot be ascribed to sheer coincidence. He also draws attention to other Shakespearean spellings found in *Othello* 1622, such as shund [shunned] and sind [sinned]. This article considers that their joint presence in *King Lear* 1608, in exactly the same spellings, cannot be ascribed to coincidence either. On all this evidence, if *More* was in Shakespeare's hand, then so was the copy for *Edward III* and *King Lear*. If so, the Oxford editors were right, and the American *Riverside* editors wrong, about both those plays.