"Would [Hand D] Had Blotted a Thousand"[1]: Textual Variation in the Supposed Shakespearean Section of *Sir Thomas More*

"Remember the players have often mentioned it as an honour[2] to Shakespeare, that in his writing, whatsoever he penned, he never blotted out a line."[3] My bardolatry[4] sustains "a steadfast eye,"[5] but Shakespeare's handwriting lives flawed "in human action and capacity."[6] No doubt, the bard's inimitable playwriting subsists extraordinary but his penmanship contains cross-outs, ink blots, textual variation, and scripted interference.[7] Using the Hand D pages of the *Sir Thomas More* manuscript and comparing his quill strokes to the first known printed typographic iteration, I shall record the insights this handwritten material illuminates about early modern theater. Through close reading English Renaissance textual culture, a better comprehension of early modern acting and other aspects of dramatic performance traditions will become clear.

Before getting into the heart of the argument, it is paleographically necessary to first include the following preface for my forthcoming claims about textual materiality. While this analysis focuses on textual variance I want to clarify that, although this is not an archival attribution[8] argument, my textual studies training leads me to paleographically read Hand D as Shakespeare. For this reason, I employ "Hand D" and "Shakespeare" interchangeably. My

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[1] Jonson, 14. – The original line reads: "would he had blotted a thousand" but since the paper is on textual variation this is an editorial pun of sorts from "Timber: or Discoveries" (published in 1640) by Ben Jonson - a classically educated, early modern playwright [June 11, 1572 – Aug. 6, 1637], one of Shakespeare's contemporaries. (Evans & Bowers, 402).

[2] I recognize that we spell this term as "honor" but the British spelling in the initial quote is "honour."

[3] Jonson, 14. – This text precedes the later portion of the quote listed in the paper's title.

[4] Shaw, preface. - "Bardolatry" is an idiomatic term that early modernist lovers of Shakespeare employ to claim their excessive admiration for the playwright playing on the term "bard" first used to describe Shakespeare in 1901 by George Bernard Shaw in his play collection *Three Plays for Puritans*. (Shaw).

[5] Shakespeare, 1338. (*The Rape of Lucrece*)

[6] Shakespeare, ii.i.279. (*Coriolanus* – Brutus)

[7] "Interference" in paleography describes when two quill strokes intersect each other in the space in between two subsequent lines of text in a manuscript. Most of the time this occurs when an ascender collides with a descender. (The Transversal Research Group in Paleography).

[8] In the field of paleography, the term "archival attribution" is used when attributing an author based on written penmanship as the main driving research factor. (National Archives – "Paleography: How to Describe Scripts").

supporting justification for Shakespeare proves numerous because handwriting analysis and rhetorical close readings most often correlate with idiosyncratic well-researched specificity. Here I provide cumulative summary, and for the sake of word count and focus, "I will be brief."[9] The eight rhetorical moments[10] only replicated in Shakespeare's plays during the period orthographically make the argument against Shakespeare as Hand D near impossible. Beyond that text-based evidence, the handwriting most clearly matches the six signatures found on legal documentation[11] including Will's will and testament. With the authorship question at least tersely addressed, I now seek to share my report on early modern performance evidence after my intense paleographic scrutiny of "every letter in the letter[ing]"[12] of Hand D.

Despite the limited material scripted by Hand D, paleographers glean a lot about early modern performance as there are several textual questions and issues throughout this portion of the script. Hand D authors the sixth scene in the show scripting the dialogue through line 165 where it switches back to Munday's[13] handwriting. This brief switch in penmanship, along with the fact that there are numerals in the corner notating "two" on the manuscript, make it seem as

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[9] Shakespeare, ii.ii.92. (*Hamlet* – Polonius)

[10] Eight instances only replicated in Shakespeare included by Hand D: "halfpenny loaf" - Hand D, Line 9 (*Sir Thomas More*) only used in Shakespeare, iv.ii.60-61 (*Henry VI, Part2*); "bear down" - Hand D, Line 48 (*Sir Thomas More*) only used in Shakespeare, iv.i.210. (*The Merchant of Venice*) & Shakespeare, i.i.11 (*Henry IV, Part 2*); "hath chid" - Hand D, Line 84 (*Sir Thomas More*) only used in Shakespeare, iii.ii.312 (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*); "shark on" - Hand D, Line 103 (*Sir Thomas More*) only used similarly in the period with "sharked up" Shakespeare, i.i.97 (*Hamlet*); "Nay, certainly" – Hand D, Line 111 (*Sir Thomas More*) only used three times in the period all of which are Shakespeare's text; "power and command" - Hand D, Line 113 only used in Shakespeare v.ii.329. (*Othello*), "unreverent" - Hand D, Line 128 (*Sir Thomas More*) only in Shakespeare, ii.i.123. (*Richard II*); "Alas, alas!" – similar response as we see in Shakespeare, ii.i.311-312. (*Measure for Measure*) while this is used other places this interjection is very much the response Shakespeare uses for Isabella (John Jowett's textual notes).

[11] The signature on the legal documents include: "Willm Shackper" from the 1612 Mountjoy suit deposition, "William Shakspear" from the 1612 Blackfriars Gatehouse deed, "Wm Shakspea" from the 1612 Blackfriars mortgage, "William Shackspere" from the 1615 will and testament (page 1), "Wllm. Shakspere" from the 1615 will and testament (page 2), and finally "by me William Shakspear" from the 1615 will and testament (page 3). (Easton – "The Collation").

[12] Shakespeare, iii.ii.73 (*Twelfth Night, or What You Will* – Maria)

[13] Anthony Munday was a playwrighting contemporary of Shakespeare known for his Robin Hood plays. His work on the *Sir Thomas More* manuscript is recognized as the primary author since his hand wrote the most amount of the material. (Munday, 45).

though these pages replaced a previous passage. Archivist Edward Maude Thompson[14] was the first early modernist to theorize that the content throughout this scene served as a replacement due to the rhetorical theatrics. More's ability to diffuse the chaotic nature of the crowd as the insurrection rises to crisis level in this scene appears quite Shakespearean.[15] I am bound to agree with Thompson's theory given the fact that Tilney expressed issues with this play noting:

> Leave out the insurrection wholly and the cause thereof, and begin with Sir Thomas More and the Mayor's session, with report afterwards of his good service done being Sheriff of London upon a mutiny against the Lombards – only by a short report, and not otherwise, at your own perils.[16]

Moreover, the "II" marked in the corner of the manuscript in the same ink coloring as Hand D's handwriting (clearly not a signature,[17] based on where it is on the page) as well as the vast '[in]significant space'[18] on the third page[19] gesture to a script change as the dialogue does not fill the page in its entirety. Simply put, both the paleography and spacing appear to back up the claim that these leaves respond to the censorship changes Tilney enforced.

While telling of Tilney's textual tirade is intriguing, the element that most enlivens my mind as a paleographer happens in the speech prefixes. Textual historians recognize in the

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[14] Edward Maude Thompson was a paleographer as well as the Principal Librarian and the first Director of the British Museum who passed on in 1929. (Kenyon & British Library)

[15] This statement is a reference to personal opinion about scene six, mixed with John Jowett's "the scene is certainly similar to Shakespeare's speeches in history plays" and W.W. Gregg's comments that it is "so very like Shakespeare." (Jowett – "Arden Early Modern Drama" & Gregg).

[16] Edmund Tilney (sometimes listed ad Tylney) was the Master of the Revels to Queen Elizabeth I and King James I. The Master of the Revels was responsible for censoring English drama. (Dutton, 12).

[17] In manuscripts, "signatures" refer to the lettering and numbered system to note the gathering or ordering of a number of leaves to ensure proper foliation and order. ("Signatures – Manuscript").

[18] The employment of "[in]significant space" here is quite intentional. "Significant space" in manuscript epistolary correspondence from the early modern era through a good way into the seventeenth century is a specific and important moment in which "letter writer's leave blank space in proportion to the social status of the addressee." (Daybell, 4 & Witt, 69). In fact, in Massinger's co-written piece *Rules of Civility*, significant space is gestured to as "the gap between the salutation and the body of the text." (Massinger, 19).

[19] Hand D's last solo page in the manuscript

typographic rendering of *Much Ado About Nothing*[20] that Shakespeare once wrote "Kempe"[21] instead of "Dogberry" in the speech prefixes. The Lord Chamberlain's Men[22] would have parts written by Shakespeare designed for specific members of its playing company. Yet, Hand D reveals something even more intriguing about Shakespeare, early modern drafting processes, and textual uncertainty. In the *More* manuscript, Shakespeare often employs what early modern literary scholar John Jowett refers to as "diminishing speech prefixes"[23] on Hand D's pages. Put another way, Shakespeare lists a named character followed by "other" (either spelled out in full, with the ligature[24] truncation "oth," or in longer lines just a miniscule[25] "o") for the conversant character. Interlinear[26] marginalia that help clarify the speaker in these "other" instances matches the penmanship of Hand C[27] rather than Shakespeare. In *other* words (literally)[28], the speech prefixes the typesetter uses for the printed copy may be misattributed to the incorrect speaking character, because Hand C did not always correctly note who the "other" was in reference to in the lines initially scripted by Hand D. In essence, the typography perpetuates mistakes in the speech prefixes throughout Shakespeare's "other" dialogue. Evidently important to note, this

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[20] Davis, 45. (The Shakespeare Name Dictionary – "Dogberry" from *Much Ado About Nothing*)

[21] Neilson, 467. – William Kempe was an early modern actor with the King's men, he was known for his performance of the comedic roles. He left the company to pursue Morris dancing tours and was subsequently replaced by Robert Armin.

[22] The "Lord Chamberlain's Men" was the name for the playing company that performed at the Blackfriars and the Globe in the early modern period containing actors such as Richard Burbage, Cuthbert Burbage, William Kempe, Robert Armin, and William Shakespeare. Before 1564-1567 the company was known as the Hunsdon's Men because Henry Carey (1st Lord Husdon) took office as the Lord Chamberlain in 1585. After the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, King James I became the company's patron and they became known as the "King's Men." (Collier, 134-136).

[23] Jowett textual notes - *Arden Shakespeare Edition*, 56.

[24] "Ligature" in paleography has two meanings. Here I am referencing ligature as the truncation formation of multiple letters expressed through a single pen stroke (sort of like an early modern secretary hand contraction). (University of South Hampton – "A Short Introduction to Paleography").

[25] In paleography, "miniscule" means lowercase lettering in a manuscript ("Paleography" – Britannica).

[26] Interlinear in paleographer refers to anything that happens in between one line of handwritten text and the material written underneath it. (Library of Congress – "Paleography Interpreting Handwriting").

[27] Hand C was an unnamed scribe who is perceived to have been a professional scribe responsible for copying out a substantial section of the *Sir Thomas More* play manuscript. (Gregg, 154).

[28] The "literally" here is punning off of the idea that Shakespeare wrote "other" in these instances.

early modern "typo" (of *literal* sorts[29]) occurs inarguably[30] twice in scene six and possibly much *More*.

In fact, upon tracking the speech prefixes of the Hand D dialogue, it became rather unclear why two 'Sheriff' characters are present. Since More is the Sheriff of London, why have a second Sheriff in the scene?[31] Because of this, I think there are at least a couple of lines misattributed to an ancillary second Sheriff, which might be articulated by a different member of the raucous crowd. Austerely conveyed yet textually severe, the scripted variance unequivocally alters the dialogue set in the drama. An alternative speaker in an element of theatrical dialogue denotes different actor intention, variant reactionary stage action, and possible objective changes in the scene. Indeed, speech prefix errors morph storytelling. Honestly, I am uncertain of how many named characters share dialogue in the scene. Twelve characters enter the scene (between the primary line[32] and the two sub-scene entries[33]), but less than half of these characters speak according to the printed version of the play. The ambiguity of the "other" speech prefixes, errored by Hand C's mis-markings leaves lines spoken by incorrect characters, and lack of question by the printshop surely "speak'st not of remedy."[34] Copious textual theorists find difference regarding the speakers in this scene.

In like manner, a similar speech prefix mistake occurs between "Clown Betts" and "George Betts" in this play. Throughout lines 78-80 of scene six, citizens gather in chanting ecphonesis arguing support for either the Earl of Surrey or Shrewsbury. Breaking this cacophony

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[29] "Sorts" in a printshop refer to the loose pieces of type and something is "out of sorts" if they are low on a particular letter so the typographical error is due to actual sorts in a printshop environment (Cambridge Dictionary).

[30] Every scholar I have come across that writes on *Sir Thomas More* notes that there are issues in the names of characters in the play text in scene six. This is a widely accepted paleographic phenomenon.

[31] Other textual historians including W.W. Gregg, Edward Maude Thompson, and John Jowett agree. (Gregg & Jowett).

[32] Hand D, Line 1 (*Sir Thomas More*).

[33] Hand D, Lines 22 and 34 (*Sir Thomas More*).

[34] Shakespeare, iv.i.69. (*Romeo and Juliet* – Juliet)

of political incantation, Shakespeare writes "Bettes" (with a ligature "es") in the speech prefix for the line supporting Surrey most robustly. In every instance the "es" ligature is utilized within the *Sir Thomas More* script, the reference coincides with text communicated by "**Clown** Betts" not "*George* Betts." Despite this paleographic intelligibility, Hand C mis-marks line 37 scoring the speech prefix for "George Betts."[35]

Indubitably, however, it makes more logistical and storytelling sense for Clown Betts to communicate the line because of the repeated ligature patterning. What is more, George's character indicates: "We'll hear them both"[36] (two lines later) to finish a perfectly scanned shared line with Lincoln (in the preceding dialogue set). Therefore, George would negate his own communicated choice if he spoke twice in close sequence. The textual variance in the ligatures,[37] paired with these context clues, proves Hand C lists the wrong speaker. Moreover, Clown always expresses himself in prose, and line 37 breaks the iambic fundamentality[38] of the nobles uttering around him. Scansion problems persevere in this play concocting further textual anarchy in other instances as well.

Sir Thomas More's massive crowd scene[39] switches between verse and prose often gesturing between high class (in verse) and yeoman as well as lower classes (in prose). In the handwritten iteration all verse lines sustain consistent ten syllables per line to express the full iambic pentameter phrase clearly visible on the page. However, due to the typesetters' lack of support for justifying those lines in order to spatially indicate the verse moments, the printed copy often misses verse lines leaving lines of scansion broken-up mid-iambic sequence. An actor

[35] Hand C, Line 37 (*Sir Thomas More*).
[36] Hand D, Line 40 (*Sir Thomas More*).
[37] Here I employing the primary meaning of "ligatures" as letters.
[38] Iambic fundamentalism is just a fancy term for following five perfect iambic feet repeating unstressed and stressed syllables.
[39] Sir Thomas More, scene 6.

longing to locate the Shakespearean heartbeat[40] in the iambs[41] may completely miss verse moments because of the formatting on the typed script.

Speaking of early modern actors, the English Renaissance theatre rehearsed its shows without a director, and often playwrights embedded stage directions or character notes in the script. An evident example can be noted in the Hand D scene with Doll's character.[42] The printed version contains a change in two of the spelling choices aptly articulated in the handwriting. Doll's character thrives on sounding more educated than he actually is and, as a result, he repeatedly mispronounces words throughout this play. Doll's dialogue, though not fully malapropped,[43] usually mistakes vowels in diphthongs in his loquacious rants akin to Polonius.[44] For instance, Doll orally mangles "shrievalty"[45] almost matching the vowels of "Shrieve"[46] in playing off the rhyme in the preceding dialogue. Here Shakespeare embeds a comic moment through the doubled usage of the two stroke "e"[47] in the handwriting, which is spelled with one less vowel in the printed version. This creates a seemingly early modern "autocorrect"[48] of the purposeful misspelling. Without acknowledging the extra "e" (which again the typed version completely omits), this clever mispronunciation joke disappears. Similarly, the educated Lincoln character mocks Doll earlier in the scene stating "argo" instead of "ergo"[49] to reiterate Doll's pronunciation mistake made earlier in the play. The miniscule "a" apparent in the handwriting is

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[40] Wiggins, 34.

[41] An accepted truncation of an iamb

[42] Doll's character is a play on the word "Dull" similar to Dull from Shakespeare's *Love's Labor's Lost*. He wants to be respected very badly but often just comes across as rather dull to those around him with his mispronunciations.

[43] A malapropism is "the mistaken use of a word in place of a similar sounding one." Perhaps the most famous malaproper in Shakespeare's canon is Dogberry's character in *Much Ado About Nothing*. (Encyclopedia Brittanica).

[44] Polonius is Ophelia's helicopter parent in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

[45] Hand D, Line 51 (*Sir Thomas More*).

[46] An alternative framing for "Sheriff" in the early modern period. (OED).

[47] A two-stroke e has a swooped lettering patter in the stem of the early modern secretary hand bulb in the word.

[48] Modern "autocorrect" changes the spelling or wording because of a perceived mistakes which is exactly what a typesetter in the printshop did here as well.

[49] Hand D, Line 8 (*Sir Thomas More*).

perceived to be an error and the typesetter changes it to an "e" in the printed version leaving no trace of Lincoln's jeering witticism. Omitting the joke that Doll does not know the correct word fails to let Lincoln "jest at scars"[50] leaving the actor to "feel the wound"[51] of losing laughter.

Embedded humor provides insight from the handwritten material as does its textual framing, for the handwriting pinpoints areas in which a single letter alters the contextual meaning. Textual scholar McMilin argues that Shakespeare remedied the way More responds to the insurrection but notes that the bard disregards Tilney's desire to omit "stranger" references.[52] One particular instance in the *More* manuscript speaks to this issue. Scene six starts with many trading puns regarding goods and vegetables. In the typographic version, Lincoln shares: "They bring in strange roots, which is merely the undoing of their poor prentices. For what's a sorry parsnip to a good heart?"[53] In this instance, the typesetter took the paleography in the term "straigning" to be "strange."[54] Like W.W. Gregg questions as he grapples with the spelling, I wonder if it is a pun on 'string beans' with "stringing roots,"[55] which proved to be a common expression in the period according to the OED.[56]

If it is "stringing" then George Betts appears as the only character in the scene who speaks of "strangers," since Lincoln's line would claim a novel meaning. Thus, Shakespeare may not be disbanding from what Tilney asked for at all. George's character appears bombastically political and often heckles brusque remarks. Therefore, the employment of the "stranger" slur seems dramatically fitting. Tilney would frown upon incorporating a negative throw-away

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[50] Shakespeare, ii.ii.1. (*Romeo and Juliet* – Romeo)
[51] Continuing the quote reference earlier in the line - Shakespeare, ii.ii.1. (*Romeo and Juliet* – Romeo)
[52] McMilin, 14.
[53] Hand D, 10-13. (*Sir Thomas More*).
[54] Hand D, 14. (*Sir Thomas More*).
[55] Gregg, 345.
[56] Oxford English Dictionary (OED) definition – early modern meanings for "stringing."

affront sub-textually attacking the "Lombards"[57] for the sake of a fair quip, but Shakespeare seems to use the term tactically in the dialogue. Most importantly, this difference changes how one reacts to George when he uses the term if he serves as the only character who engages that demeaning insult.

Another area of dispute amongst paleographers involves the cross-outs. Some of these edits illuminate phonetic shifts, but this can be misleading as sometimes they denote a dialect in the text. The most famous Shakespeare example is the "sh" sound for "ch" in all of Doctor Caius' French-accented text in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.[58] In *Sir Thomas More,* a cross-out happens illustrating a ponderance of the same pronunciation shift. The printed version includes "charge" where the handwritten shows "~~sh~~charg."[59] If asked without context based on that spelling moment, I would suspect that the speaker initially had a French dialect based on Caius'[60] text alone. Contextually, the Lord Mayor cannot be French.[61] However, several middle classmen trying to look prestigious in this scene are horribly mispronounce words. So perhaps, in this bold moment of ecphonesis at the scene's apex, the mayor retorts with mispronunciation reactionary. In other words, I question if this preponderance of Hand D proves a mock in its own right towards those misarticulating words. Perhaps, Shakespeare realized this ventured a step too far because it phonetically sounds like a bad cultural appropriation of a French dialect. Not to mention, the Lord Mayor sardonically jests at his townspeople, a trait that does not jive with the character's super-objective nor gel congruently with his nature throughout the rest of the play.

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[57] See appendix: Manuscript #3: Tilney, marginalia in upper left corner of Harley MS 7368, f. 3r

[58] Shakespeare, The Merry Wives of Windsor.

[59] Hand D, Line 33 (*Sir Thomas More*).

[60] There are multiple "Caius" characters throughout Shakespeare's plays, I am here only referring to Doctor Caius from *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

[61] Given that he is the Lord Mayor of the town and how the play is set in England, it contextually would not work for him to be from France without it being an explained plot point.

Though I digress, whatever the reasoning, this cross-out provides textual evidence most fascinating and as textual historian John Jowett notes, "there is no call for a characteristically French pronunciation here." Other paleographers wonder about Shakespeare's impulse for the "sh" sound. I believe Shakespeare self-edits this moment recognizing that the scoff from the Mayor goes one jape too far.

While 2,500 words leaves little room to close read every instance of textual difference, I shall end this textual jaunt commenting on the famous double negative quibble in More's famous speech[62] where he asks the rioters to picture themselves in the position of the immigrants they attack. In every surviving textual edition ever published, the line reads: "Owed not nor made not you, nor that the elements."[63] Paleographically, the lettering proves fuzzy in the term "owed" and it could have an extra minim[64] squeezed in the middle, making the term "ow**n**ed." Personally, I find this a huge difference in meaning because owed[65] in the early modern period can mean "caused," whereas "owned" suggests a commentary alluding to servitude. "Caused" speaks to the catalyst of the bestial rioting. However, if servitude is reference here, the relationship between the rioter and its attacked suggests a circumstance even more inhumane. This instance alone proves the stakes at play in textual variation.

In sum, the early modern period survives as a theatrical era where print's beginnings left many theatrical questions answered through the quill and ink of the handwritten word. *Sir Thomas More*'s textual variations provide a glimpse into the world of early modern acting and production through understanding what changes between the written and the typed phrasing with

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[62] Hand D, Line 111-156 (*Sir Thomas More*).
[63] Hand D, Line 152 (*Sir Thomas More*).
[64] A "minim" in paleography is the term for the number of humps in letters like "n" or "m." ("Paleography" – Britannica).
[65] Oxford English Dictionary (OED) Definition – early modern meanings for "owed" and "owned."

regards to choices and their storytelling impact. Remnants of the period illustrate brief "textual perditas"[66] being asked to communicate the full story. In this metaphor, it is almost as if the framing of *A Winter's Tale*[67] begins in the second half, and Hermione's past persists as a statue never unfreezing.[68] Paleographers, textual historians, and early modern historiographers examine the fragments that have been found to better comprehend the unattainable layers in time's stone.[69] With an acknowledgement of the loss and the locating of these pieces, I cannot help but agree with Ben Jonson, if only much *[M]ore*[70] existed. Oh, Hand D, "would he had blotted a thousand."[71]

[66] "Textual Perdita" is a term that I am coining in my forthcoming dissertation work to discuss handwritten items that like Perdita's character from Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale* – the oracle in the play ends with "the King shall live without an heir if that which is lost be not found" – Shakespeare, iii.ii.142. (*A Winter's Tale* – Delphi oracle read by the Officer)

[67] Shakespeare, *A Winter's Tale*.

[68] Shakespeare, vi.iii. (*A Winter's Tale*).

[69] The reference to "time's stone" here is in referring to the primary comment in this compound-complex sentence in where Hermione's character for *A Winter's Tale* is perceived as a stone statue.

[70] Punning of the editing framing and the fact that the manuscript is *Sir Thomas <u>More</u>*

[71] Jonson, 14. (Timber, or Discoveries).

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