Rogus’ True Transcription of Hand D Pages. \*\*\*\*hovering page\*\*\*\*

Hand D: Shakespeare? Handwriting Analysis \*\*\*below in Word Doc\*\*\*\*

Performance Edition of Sir Thomas More: Hand D \*\*\*TBD\*\*\*\*\*

Shakespearean Paleography Links \*\*\*\*links in IJ “Other Page”\*\*\*\*

Hand D or not Hand D?: An Analysis of Shakespeare’s Handwriting

The question about the presence of William Shakespeare’s handwriting on the *Sir Thomas More* manuscript has intrigued paleographers for years. Although there is paleographic evidence that this is indeed Shakespeare’s handwriting from deep scrutiny and archival analysis, some are still skeptical about whether or not Shakespeare could have written the text. This analysis will provide a survey of the main historical research behind these claims that will enable a full look at this debate. As part of this analytical work, the paleography will read in direct comparison with Shakespeare’s authentic signatures as a point of comparison.

To begin, I will start with the basics of what we historically know. Studies into locating and identifying Shakespeare’s handwriting really did not gain much traction until Edmond Malone and George Stevens began investigating and theorizing in the 18th century (Martin, 224). From these studies, it was stated that Shakespeare was right-handed (Martin, 223). All the signatures and the *Sir Thomas More* manuscript leaves in question gesture to someone who was in fact right-handed. All of these instances are also recorded in early modern secretary hand which a young William Shakespeare would have been taught in grammar school starting at a very young age like five to eight years old (Jones, 37). There are six surviving authentic extent signatures (see figures 1-6) that exist with different spellings of Shakespeare’s name in each instance.

Figure 1. “Willm Shakp” - Bellott vs Mountjoy Case Depositon (May 11, 1612)

British National Archives, REQ 1/183, f. 269, May 7, 1612.

Figure 2. “William Shaksper” – Blackfriars, London house purchase contract (March 10, 1613) “Shakespeare Deed to the Blackfriars Property,” Metropolitan Archives, London 2r, MS 543.

Figure 3. “Wm Shaksp” – Mortgage of Blackfriars Property (March 11, 1613)

“Shakespeare Mortgage for Blackfriars Property,” Metropolitan Archives, London 3r, MS 545.



Figure 4. “William Shakspere” – Signature on Page One of His Will (March 25, 1616)

Treasure for the British National Archives – Shakespeare Will and Testament



Figure 5. “Willm Shakspere” – Signature on Page Two of His Will (March 25, 1616)

Treasure for the British National Archives – Shakespeare Will and Testament



Figure 6. “William Shakspeare” – Signature on the Last Page of His Will (March 25, 1616) Treasure for the British National Archives – Shakespeare Will and Testament

Out of these signatures, the final three are written from the hand of an ill William Shakespeare who was scripting a will on his deathbed and therefore have their own wobbly variation compared to when Shakespeare was well and healthy (Thurston, 114). These remaining more steady-handed signatures reveal a lot in their paleographic characters. The horizontal stroke above the “m” that appears in two instances seems to show a pattern rather than an extra stroke line. Additionally, the flourish on the “p’s” descender sustains a similar flourish in all of the signatures present. Also, the long magiscule “S” matches the Italian form of the cursive letter at the start of the surname in these signatures. However, what is most interesting about the signatures is the formation of the “k” in the name as that formulation of pen strokes and connections is very distinct. So although there are not more legal documents containing a greater quantity of his writing on the pages, paleographers can glean quite a bit from just looking at what the surviving Shakespeare signatures.

Moreover, in the First Folio Heminges and Condell noted at the forefront of the volume that: “Shakespeare’s mind and hand went together, and what he thought he uttered with that easiness that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers” (Condell, 3). This partnered with Ben Jonson sharing, “I remember the players have often mentioned it as an honor to Shakespeare, that in his writing, whatsoever he penned, he never blotted out a line,” jointly illuminates the lack of blotting or error (Jonson, 34). While this is, as Jonson suggests, an homage to Shakespeare by his colleagues posthumously, knowing the seldom nature of the blotting is helpful in looking at the materiality of Shakespeare’s handwriting. If you look at the signatures and the pages Shakespeare is said to have written in *Sir Thomas More* manuscript, it is clear that the lack of blotting and mistake issue holds true. Now it is worth noting that the signatures would likely not illuminate this as much as the fuller manuscript with three leaves illustrating the hand, but given the parallel tendency it is nonetheless worth noting.

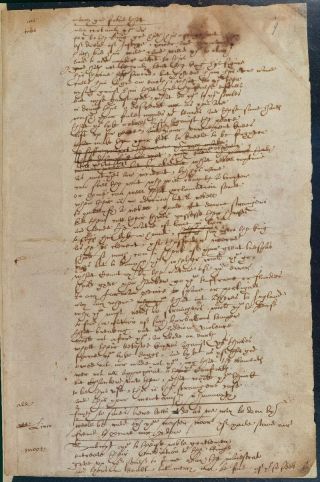


Figure 7. Sir Thomas More Manuscript British Library, Harley MS 7368, ff. 8r.

Looking at this writing and comparing it to what is in the *Sir Thomas More* pages (Figure 7) written by Hand D that is attributed to Shakespeare is an intriguing feat as well when trying to contextualize whether or not Shakespeare wrote these pages. The writing scrutiny around Shakespeare’s hand was first fully investigated by Sir Edward Maunde Thompson in 1916 since the paleographer shared that, “Shakespeare’s handwriting had never been subjected to a thorough and systematic study” (Thompson, 12). Thompson wanted to have a stronger claim than James Spedding had in the 1870s when Spedding shared that, “the handwriting found in the *Sir Thomas More* manuscript agrees with [Shakespeare’s] signature, which is a simple one, and written in the ordinary character of the time” (Serafin, 316). After studying the *Sir Thomas More* manuscript, Thompson shared that there are, “sufficient close resemblances [that] have been detected to bring the two handwritings together and to identify them as coming from one and the same hand” which means Thompson personally feels, “confident that […] we have indeed the handwriting of William Shakespeare” (Thompson, 41). Thompson made strides in navigating the *Sir Thomas More* manuscript in his scrutiny at the start of the 20th century, but there is still discrepancy about his findings to this date. Taking a deeper look at the five main distinctive paleographical formed letters will aid in seeing where Thompson’s claims are coming from to gain better insight into the debate in question about whether Shakespeare is Hand D.

When initially sharing the signatures of Shakespeare, at the forefront of this section, notes on some of the general features were mentioned, however an overview of the main features that connect the two hands will be more explicitly outlined here. One telling sign in early modern paleography is the formation of the letter “a” in the miniscule (or lowercase) form since in early modern secretary hand there are two main ways to decipher the letter form: closed and open. Shakespeare clearly frames his miniscule “a” with an open top almost like a “u” and the consistency of that letter framing continues throughout Hand D’s pages in the *Sir Thomas More* manuscript in a similar fashion. The derivation for the early modern secretary hand letter form for the miniscule “a” most clearly resembles the formation of the Middle Ages Latin script insular half-unical form in Ireland (Bischoff, 84). Comparing the *Sir Thomas More* manuscript to the research by Bernard Bischoff in his book, *Latin Paleography*, helps to unearth where that letter form originated from (Bischoff, 85). This also illuminates just how far back this tendency with the lowercase “a” dates back in time. What is perhaps most intriguing about this is that historically the tendency to have the open form at the top of the “a” resembling a similar letter form from the Middle Ages gestures towards the solid grammar school training that Shakespeare had leading him towards a concreate comprehension of letter forms. The fact that Shakespeare would select the open framing of the “a” likely illustrates the Latin basis in his schooling.

In addition to the framing of the letter “a,” there exists definitive similarity in the minim letters (“m” and “n”). The “m” and “n” both appear to share similarities with the Italian Luxeuil type tendency with the formation of the concavity of the letter forms (Bischoff, 104). When Bernhard Bischoff talks about the scriptive qualities of the “m” in this way in his book, there is discussion about the pace of writing truncating the curvature of the letters (Bischoff, 104). The *Sir Thomas More* manuscript shows a tendency towards framing these letters with a focus on speed rather than clarity of letter formation as most of the “m” and “n” moments are not fully formed which matches the essence of the lettering seen in Italian Luxeuil. As Thompson points out in his analysis of this letter, the “m” has a straightened last stroke in sequence which is distinct and common in the signatures as well as in the minim uses throughout the *Sir Thomas More* manuscript (Thompson, 23). Between this and the magiscule “S” in the signature (as mentioned in the discussion about the signatures), the tendency towards the Italian letter form present in these letters shows the push away from the chancery cursive letter forms which were also a common handwriting style in early modern England (Hamilton, 140). Likewise, this illuminates the positive impact that Italian handwriting had on the formation of the early modern secretary hand alphabet.

The miniscule letters are not the only letter forms that are revealing and similar between the Shakespeare signatures and *the Sir Thomas More manuscript*, the formation of the magiscule (uppercase) “W” presents as one of the most distinct letter forms in both writing samples. Thompson shares that the framework is reminiscent of a German cursive capital but does not account for the ornamental dot which is not present in that German cursive tendency (Thompson, 25). Rather than listing it as a side feature, I will argue that the “W” evolved from the framing of the letter from the development in the late medieval era. According to Peter T. Daniels and William Bright’s *The World’s Writing Systems* book, the medieval scriptive framework for the flourish on the magiscule “W’ sustains the same framed sweeping movement as the writing seen in the late Medieval Runes table of letters (Daniels & Bright, 337). The sweeping gesture of the form matching the medieval formulation of the letter speaks to the approach stroke content that was picked up from the preceding handwriting system. The fact that the magiscule “W” in the *Sir Thomas More* manuscript shares the same curvature pattern as the surname in each of the signatures shows paleographic evidence of the hands crafting the letters likely being the same.

Perhaps the most telling letter in all of the signature work by Shakespeare is the framework for the letter “r.” The miniscule form of the letter “r” in early modern secretary hand can be quite variable, but the similarity and clarity in the repetition here makes the framing of the letter quite distinct. Thompson points out in the *Sir Thomas More* manuscript that there is only one “r” that does not follow the pattern that is set forth in the signatures. I believe this is just a lesser formed miniscule “r” rather than a variation since the ill signatures of Shakespeare shown by the writing on his will illuminate the variation of letter forms in the descending fashion when fatigued. What is the most recognizable about the “r” is that its relation to the base stem is curved in a very articulate manner quite unique to Shakespeare’s handwriting, and therefore it is harder to track its direct line of inspiration from past handwriting systems. The flat into the curved nature of the miniscule letter shows some similarities to the visigothic miniscule forms in the Daniels and Bright examples but, even so, it is not as clear of an evolution as some of the other letter forms mentioned in this paper (Daniels & Bright, 337). What this indicates is the sincere inimitability of Shakespeare’s letter formation of the “r” which would prove useful in deciphering whether or not another manuscript was written by him. Thompson argues that it is the letters that are distinct that help to show the Shakespearean qualities in the *Sir Thomas More* manuscript and based on the individuality of the framework of this letter form, it is likely the “r” falls in this category (Thompson, 34).

The last instance worth noting in this overview of the Shakespeare paleography debate over whether or not Shakespeare is Hand D is the early modern secretary hand “c” that is recurrent in the *Sir Thomas More* manuscript. Although not in Shakespeare’s signature, the crossbar identity that is in the “c” in the *Sir Thomas More* manuscript can also be seen in the framing of other letters in the signatures. This crossing bar formation likely comes from the way of connecting the humanist cursive forms as Daniels and Bright illustrate when examining the different formalized cursive scripts (Daniels and Bright, 323). The framing of the cross form does not only exist in the letter “c,” and knowing that the crossed “c” is what is used throughout the *Sir Thomas More* text in question points to a hand that will use the cross feature in other letters more readily. This is why when first examining the basics of the signatures I mentioned the letter “k” is distinct. The cross formation in that letter in the signatures alludes to the likelihood that the writer would use a crossed miniscule “c” when writing. While this one is less definitive than the other examples, picking up on fluidity tendencies within the cross figuring can prove helpful. This also serves as an example of why there is still doubt about whether or not this is Shakespeare’s handwriting. While lots of studying and analysis has gone into deciphering the handwriting forms, a lack of a complete alphabet in the authentic signatures does unfortunately lead to some paleographic guess work.

Overall, taking the time to look at the letter forms of Shakespeare’s handwriting shows not only trends and tendencies that can help in navigating whether or not Shakespeare wrote *Sir Thomas More*, but also understanding the history of the letter forms. Historically, the inspirations of the letters from previous time periods can enlighten new understanding of the paleographic choices made. Knowing Shakespeare’s background at grammar school and the basis for the letter forms assists in understanding why Shakespeare likely framed certain letters that way that he did in his signatures. Whether or not a scholar believes that Shakespeare wrote *Sir Thomas More*, this analysis illuminates through the use of paleographical analysis why Thompson reached the conclusions he did regarding the handwriting based on the similarities observed. By taking the time to look at the basis for these arguments around the manuscript, we can gain a deeper understanding about what is being debated and why historicizing this argument matters.

In essence, by taking the time to unpack and understand the heart of the arguments surrounding Shakespeare debates, the basis for each side of the argument is clarified. In examining the meaning of “bard” and its etymology, the debate of appropriateness with regard to the terminology becomes clearer. Similarly, breaking apart the history behind and paleography within the *Sir Thomas More* manuscript helps in comprehending the basis for the penmanship debate. It is through historical research and avid material comprehension of texts that interpreting full meaning can aptly occur. These two Shakespeare debates illuminate the necessity of understanding the historical contexts to enable full comprehension of a textual debate or discrepancy. Understanding the Shakespeare history backing the arguments strengthens our understanding of the bard and Hand D in ways that would otherwise be overlooked.

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