

# SHAKESPEARE IN COMPOSITION

## *Evidence for Oxford's Authorship of "The Book of Sir Thomas More"*

Fran Gidley

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THE play *Sir Thomas More* survived its obscure Elizabethan origins to resurface in the nineteenth century in a single manuscript copy, now in the British Library. What attention it has since received is due to its association with Shakespeare, a matter for decades of scholarly debate. Now, not only can much of the debate over the authorship of *More* be resolved by the Oxfordian thesis, i.e. that the seventeenth Earl of Oxford was "Shakespeare," this manuscript provides exciting evidence for the manner in which he composed his plays.

The manuscript itself is confusing. It appears to be a composite or collaborative effort involving six anonymous writers, which is how it is viewed by today's mainstream orthodoxy. First is the original play, the longest portion of text, neatly and closely written and obviously a fair copy.<sup>1</sup> The handwriting of this section has been identified as Anthony Munday's, who has also been credited as the main playwright. Munday's fair text is much befouled with markings and over-writings. Passages and entire scenes are cancelled, while revisions of these are supplied, in varying amounts of material, in five other hands, the so-called Additions. The intended placement of at least one short Addition is uncertain. And no matter how these Additions are placed, there are still gaps in continuity. A seventh manuscript hand is identified as that of the stage censor, Sir Edmund Tilney, who wrote general instructions for revision on the first page of text, along with objections to certain words and passages. His marks of disapproval throughout the text are usually distinguishable from editorial marks because of the shade or shades of ink used by each writer.

### **The plot of the play**

The play depicts Sir Thomas More's rise from London sheriff to Lord Chancellor of England, followed by his subsequent imprisonment and execution. The play is neatly balanced between the phases of rise and fall, with seven scenes for his rise, seven for his fall, and three for the in-between period of his prosperity. His rise begins when, as sheriff, he ends a May Day riot with an eloquent speech to the angry citizens of London. His worth recognized, More is named Lord Chancellor in Scene 7. Scenes 8 and 9 show him at home receiving guests and dealing with official business. In Scene 10, More's fall begins when he resigns his office rather than sign the "Articles" demanded by the King. His character is revealed in the final scenes as he weighs his conscience against the welfare of his family and staff. The pressure is intensified in Scene 12 when Bishop John Fisher, who has also refused to sign, is confined in the Tower, and then by More's identical sentence in Scene 13. More shows his true greatness in the final Scene when he is taken to the block, accepting his Fate with courage and humor.

## Enter Shakespeare

Shakespeare was brought into the *More* picture in 1871. At some point before that date a reader thought that one of the “additional hands” (Hand D) might resemble the five Shakspeare signatures then known to exist. Others approved this exciting possibility: at last, dramatic writing in Shakespeare’s own hand! It must be emphasized that not all examiners of the manuscript, then or later, agreed to the supposed resemblance (Ogburn 122). In any case, no reputable modern expert would think of affirming Hand D as the maker of the six signatures with so small a sample of letters for comparison.

A second factor that enticed the view that Shakespeare wrote Hand D was the nature of its language which seemed to many entirely worthy of the Bard. Over the years, supporters of *More*’s Shakespearean authorship have argued their case persuasively enough to win wide canonical acceptance of the Hand D segment. Quite interestingly, another small portion of text has also been granted canonical status by the same authorities, even though it is written in Hand C. This soliloquy, which was apparently meant to follow soon after the events in Hand D, seems equally Shakespearean. (Did Shakespeare instruct C? Had C recopied his work?)

Recent decades have brought further extensions of the Shakespeare attribution. Some have asked whether there are really substantial stylistic differences between the scenes widely held to be Shakespeare’s and the rest of the play. Some say “no,” maintaining that Shakespeare wrote either the whole play or most of it.

When Thomas Merriam, a stylometrist, tested *More* and a sampling of canonical plays against his “composite value for Shakespeare,” he came up with .45 for *Caesar*, .40 for *Lear*, .35 for *Pericles*, and an impressive .26 for *More*. *More*’s figure becomes even more impressive when contrasted with a work known to be by Munday. To respond to criticism that he “had used tests that would not distinguish Elizabethan plays by different authors,” Merriam tested Munday’s *John a Kent and John a Cumber* from a manuscript also in Munday’s handwriting. This scored .000000163! Merriam’s system, however faulty, might at least give us some reason to doubt Munday’s authorship of his fair copy.<sup>2</sup>

Stratfordian scholar Eric Sams agrees with Merriam’s conclusion.<sup>3</sup> While disputing the validity of using stylometry programs to determine authorship without the support of other evidence, Sams refers to *More* eight times as he constructs his picture of the youthful Will’s experiences and abilities in *The Real Shakespeare*. Sams believes that *More*’s “whole text has been cogently attributed to [Shakespeare], on detailed evidence” (167). Sams was convinced by the “method of cumulative detail” (192) in *The Authorship of Sir Thomas More by J. Mills*, a method he himself employs at exhaustive length in his *Shakespeare’s Lost Play, Edmund Ironside*.

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### A Shakespearean voice

It is not surprising that Shakespearean scholars have claimed parts or all of *More* for Shakespeare since there are so many similarities linking them, of which we offer a few from the original play:<sup>4</sup>

- De Bard (attempting to drag Doll away for lustful use): thou art my prize and I plead purchase of thee. (Scene 1)
- R3: made prize and purchase of his wanton eye. (III.7.187)
- More: to urge my imperfections in excuse, were all as stale as custom. (Scene 6)
- A&C: Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety. (II.2.234)
- Doll: I do owe God a death, and I must pay him. (Scene 7)
- 2H4: A man can die but once, we owe God a death. (III.2.235)
- Surrey: I here pronounce free pardon for them all. (Scene 7)
- 2H6: And here pronounce free pardon for them all. (IV.8.9)
- Randall: (completing his attire, presumably tying his points): Yes my Lord, I stand but upon a few points. (Scene 8)
- MND (word-play on another meaning of points): This fellow doth not stand upon points (V.1.118)
- 3H6: Wherefore stand you on nice points? (IV.7.58)
- HAM: to this point I stand. (IV.5.134)
- More: I[']ll be thy glass, dress thy behavior according to my carriage. (Scene 8)
- 2H4: He was indeed the glass wherein the noble youth did dress themselves. (II.3.21)
- Surrey: (speaking of Lord Chancellor More who “tends our state”): That Study is the general watch of England . . . the Princes safety, and the peace. . . (Scene 8)

For greater enjoyment, download and print the full play from the internet:  
*original spelling version:* [http://www.unibas.ch/shine/linkstoworks\\_apocryphawf.htm](http://www.unibas.ch/shine/linkstoworks_apocryphawf.htm)  
*modernized spelling version:* [http://www.unibas.ch/shine/linkstoworks\\_apocryphawf.htm](http://www.unibas.ch/shine/linkstoworks_apocryphawf.htm)



- HV:           What watch the King keeps to maintain the peace. (IV.1.283)
- Surrey:       pale blood which war sluic'd forth ("pale" because French). (Scene 10)
- RII:           Sluic'd out his innocent soul through streams of blood. (I.1.103)

The use of *sluice* as a verb is innovative. The OED gives 1593 as the date for earliest verbal usage by two writers. Nashe's *Christ's Teares* coins two specialized senses while Shakespeare's above line coins this one: "To let out, to cause to flow out, by the opening of a sluice. Freq. fig. [figurative]." The *More* "sluic'd forth" has the identical sense as the Shakespearean "sluiced out."

- More:         More rest enjoys the subject meanly bred, than he that bears the  
Kingdom in his head. (Scene 13)
- 2H4:         Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown. (II.1.31)

More seems to bear the entire weight of state and mentions elsewhere the "sound sleeps" he must lose. The ability of simple subjects to sleep while the sovereign cannot is a theme with Shakespeare.

- More:         I will subscribe to go unto the Tower . . . and thereto add my bones to  
strengthen the foundation of Julius Caesars palace. (Scene 13)

Both *Richard II* and *Richard III* connect Julius Caesar to the Tower. How many Elizabethan playwrights made this connection?

From the Additions, a few of the many indications of a mutual authorship throughout and in common with the canon:

- More:         the Court . . . being more frail composed of gilded earth (Hand A,  
Addition I)
- R2:           men are but gilded loam or painted clay (I.1.79)
- More:         say they be stripped from this poor painted cloth this outside of the  
earth
- LLL:         be scrap'd out of the painted cloth for this (V.2.575) (there are four  
more canonical references to painted cloths, a substitute for tapestries)
- More:         for the axe is set even at my root to fell me to the ground
- 3H6:         we set the axe to thy usurping root (11.2.165)
- TIM:         Come hither, ere my tree hath felt the axe (V.1.211)
- Faukner:     I am he In faith my Lord, I am ipse (Hand C, Addition IV)
- AYLI:        all your writers do consent that ipse is he; now, you are not ipse,  
for I am he (V.1.43)

Faukner: the azurd [sic] heavens (Scene 8)

TEM: the azur'd vault (V.1.43)

Faukner: I know your honor is wise. and so forth. (Four Shakespearean characters shorten their lists with “and so forth,” plus one “or so forth.”)

### Shakespearean humor

Providing Sir Thomas with a keen sense of humor was a requirement for this dramatist because his major source (Roper) spoke much of More's wit and quoted examples. So More is merry or ironic as occasions suggest—fairly exploding with gallows humor at the end. Surrey is also a witty jokester, and wordplay abounds. The dramatist created six minor roles to add individualized types of drollery. It would seem he far exceeded his necessity.

Doll Williamson has an important part in the citizens' scenes and is more a heroine than a figure of fun. Still, either she has a humorous tendency to take things too literally (like Grumio in *Taming of the Shrew*) or she has a very dry sense of humor:

George: Let some of us enter the strangers houses, and if we find them there,  
then bring them forth.

Doll: If ye bring them forth before ye find them, I[']ll never allow of that.

During the trial which introduces Sheriff More, More employs the underworld skills of the cut-purse Lifter to confound the pompous Justice Suresby (Sure-as-can-be?). Lifter's clever tactics gradually win Suresby's confidence until he is trapped by the pickpocket's ploy and lightened of his purse. Although the stage business must be imagined, we see the dramatist's art in plot-development and sketching character with a few deft strokes, as in the process of Suresby's entrapment. At first Suresby calls Lifter only “varlet” and “knave,” then “honest knave” and “my knave,” then by his name—at which point it becomes clear that Suresby is ripe for plucking. The comic routine ends with the engaging rogue saved from hanging.

The Clown added to Scenes 4 and 7 displays a saucy bravado:

Now mars for thy honor dutch or french so it be a wench i[']ll upon her.

More's servant Randall is another figure of fun. When More uses him to play a merry jest upon the great scholar Erasmus, Randall becomes the butt of the joke, as will be shown later.

Finally there is Jack Faukner, a many-faceted gem of a character. As with Randall, Faukner's original in Scene 8 is polished in the Hand C reworking. Despite his rough appearance—he has not cut his hair in three years—his smooth and facile tongue is ready to argue every point. Faukner's inflated self-opinion is amusing, but it is his deliberate misinterpretation of word-meanings that is most amusing. In this exchange, More is made Faukner's straight man:

More: how long have you worn this hair

- Fauk: I have worn this hair ever since I was born
- More: you know thats not my Question. but how long hath this shag fleece  
hung dangling on thy head
- Fauk: how long my Lord. why sometimes thus Long  
sometimes Lower . . . .

This is pure Shakespeare.

### Literary forensics

Greg concluded that all of the so-called Additions were present when the play was handed over to the Master of Revels, countering the notion that the play was revised after Tilney had read it. Two short revisions had been pasted over their original texts. No revision addresses the strong objections written by Tilney on the first page. In fact, there were three long rewrites (of scenes 4, 5, and 6) that dealt with the subject specifically forbidden by Tilney: the citizens' uprising. He directed that the "insurrection" be left out "wholly and the cause thereof" with only "a report" of More's "good service done . . . upon a mutiny against the Lombards, only by a short report and not otherwise. . . ." (xiii-ix). Thus Scenes 1, 4, 5, 6, and 7 were condemned, all to be condensed into "a short report." As Greg remarked, the play would have been eviscerated.

Tilney's censorship is understandable; certainly the play was politically incorrect. How dangerous to portray before London audiences these likeable, honest, and earnest Londoners, so sorely misused, taking the law into their own hands, committing acts of violence, and then finally fully pardoned by a Tudor monarch! Tilney also disapproved of another scene, one that no Addition changed. This was Scene 10, the play's turning point, where More refuses to endorse King Henry's supremacy over the Church—referred to in the play as the "Articles."

So why did Tilney object to part of Scene 10? It could be argued that it was not true to history; More had resigned his office before the oath was put to him and voluntarily retired to his Chelsea home. Nor was the Bishop of Rochester sent immediately to the Tower, as in the play. But was Tilney such a stickler for accuracy? Did he even know the exact circumstances of More's fall? Since Tilney made no more comments or marks after Scene 10, we may wonder whether he even bothered to read any further. As he may have been aware, his first objection had dealt the play such a killing blow that *Sir Thomas More* was unlikely to turn up at his office for a long time, if ever.

There is another small piece of evidence that the manuscript included the Additions when it was given to Tilney. Greg calls the foreigners "Lombards," but, although George Betts called de Bard "Lombard" in one scene, and "lombard" does appear in one addition, in every other instance the foreign residents are referred to as "french," "dutch," or "flemish." It was Tilney who insisted that they be "Lombards," marking through "frenchmen" several times; but in the Scene 4 revision, the citizens go after the French, Dutch, or Flemings as in the original version. No one can doubt that the Additions formed part of the manuscript when it was handed in to the Office of Revels.

### The order of composition of the Additions

Greg gave what evidence there is to indicate the order of composition of the Additions. Scribe C “edits . . . D freely,” adding frequent notes and directions both to B and S (viii-ix). E continues one of C’s scenes. A’s single contribution, a long revision of a Scene 13 passage, cannot be placed in relation to the others, and there is no indication who wrote first, B or D. But clearly C followed B and D, while E came later, possibly last of all. Greg calls hand C “the most important of the additional hands” and views him as the play’s general editor.

Greg considers the question of the play’s authorship at some length (xvi-xviii), beginning with a “common assumption has been that the diversity of hands represents diversity of authorship.” This is “not unreasonable” but “needs, however, careful testing.” He ponders which scribal hands had composed their own material and which may merely have copied it.

For reasons to be seen later, Greg dismissed Scribe S (Anthony Munday) as author of his fair copy. Greg did not consider E at all, probably because his one contribution was so short that it is hardly capable of stylistic comparison. Greg maintained that A and D were “independent” authors, concerned only with the one portion each revised because both changed their texts in the process of entering them. Having said “there is nothing to prevent one of the additional hands from being that of the original author,” he was left with only B and C as the possible original author. C had recopied some of B’s lines

into their proper context. . . . In this case, at least, therefore he is not an original author but a copyist. . . . B is undoubtedly an original author, for he writes roughly and often barely legibly. . . . It is conceivable that he may have been the original author. At any rate *I can detect no difference in style between the portions written by S and those written by B and C.* (xviii, emphasis added)

Of A Greg admitted: “I cannot honestly say that I detect any marked difference of style between the original scene [13] and the addition” by A. So we find Greg as the earliest scholar to detect a common style in the original play and its A, B, and C Additions and to imagine a single main authorship despite “diversity of hands.” B gets Greg’s final nod as the possible or probable main author of *More*—for one thing, his poor handwriting would have most needed recopying!

### Evidence of dictation

Neither Greg nor any orthodox Shakespearean so far has envisioned a playwright who dictated to secretaries, although many Additions to *More* have features that strongly suggest dictation, for instance, their lack of punctuation, which he notes without questioning. In Hand A, punctuation is “rather scanty,” B’s is “negligible,” C’s is “little beyond a point,” while D has “very little.” There are a number of abbreviations, including instances when the same word had not been abbreviated in the original text. B “writes roughly and often barely legibly. . . . He scribbles his text first and inserts the names of the speakers afterward . . . or forgets them altogether.” D is “a careless

writer.” All this suggests that speed was a factor, as it must be for someone attempting to keep up with the rapid flow of human speech.

Lack of punctuation is one clue, while curiously misplaced periods is another. Sometimes a speaker’s final sentence ends with a point, more often without one. However, in one section of Addition IV, right after Faulkner’s entrance, it is not C’s underuse of points that is odd, but his overuse. He adds periods where even a comma would seem unnecessary, breaking the natural flow of the sentence:

sblood If all the dogs in paris garden. hung at my tale. If]d shake em off with this.

that If]ll appear. before no king Christened but my good Lord Chancellor . . .

A fellow of your hair is very fit. to be a secretarys follower

I thought it stood not with my reputation and degree. to come to my Questions and answers. before a City Justice.

Why so many unnatural stops? If C were composing his lines himself he would know that his sentence was not finished. But if he were hearing a voice speaking the words, and that voice stopped to think ahead, C might presume a stop and enter a period.

The clearest indication of dictation, if not actual proof of it, is found in two scene revisions: B’s of Scene 4 and C’s of Scene 8. Both contain many lines and passages either repeated verbatim from their original texts or with only a few small changes in wording. And yet there are striking differences in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization between the two sets of identical or almost identical lines. In a situation like this, individual preferences and inconsistencies in that age of non-standardization are beside the point; it is simply faster and easier to copy what has already been written than it is to invent variations—especially in the case of proper names and less-familiar words. For instance, why would B change the original “Mewtas a wealthie Piccarde” to “mutas a welthy piccardye”? Why should C change the original “His Lordship hath some weightie busines” to “his Lo hath som waightie Busines”? Anyone who carefully compares the two sets of like passages will discover so many variations of this kind that it must seem impossible that B and C were looking back and forth to the original text as they revised it. The only alternative is that they were hearing the lines recited by someone else, most likely the author. The identical circumstance would apply to Hands A and D, those Greg was forced to see as “independent” authors because they made changes to their sections. These too are most logically read as secretaries taking dictation.

### **Anachronisms**

Authenticity was hardly our dramatist’s major concern since anachronisms and distortions of various sorts abound in this play, as in Shakespeare’s. The facts were certainly known to him since it is clear that he used Hall’s *Chronicle* and Roper’s *The Life of Sir Thomas More* as reference, so we can be sure his alterations were deliberate.



One type of distortion in *More* that is also typical of Shakespeare is the compression or extension of time. Widely separated events are made to occur all at once, as in Scenes 6 and 7, where *More* is brought before the King's notice immediately following the May Day riots, knighted, then made Privy Councillor and Lord Chancellor, historically events separated by many years. This compression creates the opposite effect on his career as Lord Chancellor, causing it to extend far beyond the less than three years that he was actually in office. Other instances in *More* show that its author shared Shakespeare's poetic license with history for the sake of dramatic effect.

A biographical anachronism occurs in Scene 9. As a youth, More served in Cardinal Morton's household where he enacted extempore parts with Morton's players. The dramatist moved this incident from More's youth and applied it to the period of his Lord Chancellorship, actually some three decades later.

A topical anachronism, again in Scene 9, occurs when one of the actors has to run to "Oagles" for a beard. Greg tells us that "a John Ogle or Owgle appears in this capacity [of wigmaker] in the Revels' accounts for 1572-3 and 1584-5" (xix). Surely the dramatist named a real wigmaker from his own time.

### Dating the play by means of anachronisms

This mention of a mid-sixteenth century theatrical wigmaker should help to date the play, but Greg ignores it, preferring the early 1590's (xix), an opinion based primarily on the beginning of Addition V where the name "T Goodal" has been entered in the margin as "Mess" (Messenger). According to Greg, a "Goodal or Goodale" played a part in *Seven Deadly Sins*, a piece acted by Strange's players, of which a plot and cast probably belonging to 1592 is extant." However, it seems that Goodal had been an actor for some years before that date, as "the only other mention of him is as early as 1581, when on 11 July he is named in a document of the City of London as one of Lord Berkeley's players who were engaged in an affray with certain gentlemen of Gray's Inn" (xix).

An anachronism in Addition IV, Hand C, might serve to limit that section's earliest-possible composition. After his haircut Faulkner says he looks "thus like a Brownist." The Brownist sect originated about 1580 (DNB).

### Exclamation points

There is another factor that Greg missed that might be of some value in dating the original version of the play to earlier than the '90s. Greg carefully transcribed every mark of punctuation in the document, but nowhere is there an exclamation point—although certainly many lines or single words demand this emphasis. Yet the scribe of the original play provided ample punctuation, almost enough to be considered "modern," and used many different marks. But even great shouts of a crowd, for instance, end in periods. In the Additions, Hand C twice used the older mark of emphasis, the question mark:

- Fauk:           to newgate sblood Sir Thomas More I appeal I appeal? from newgate to  
any of the two worshipful counters . . . .
- More:           he [Erasmus] left me heavy when he went from hence But this  
recomforts me?

It would be most interesting to ascertain when the modern exclamation point first came into wide use in England.

### "Shakespeare's" Hand D

As for the famous Hand D scene, both Oxfordians and orthodox Shakespeareans might object to certain of Greg's opinions—though not necessarily the same ones. Although he knew that D's handwriting was the one "that so many have desired to see," Greg could not agree that it was Shakespeare's. Despite the scene's "undoubted literary merit," he preferred to assign it "to the writer who, as I believe, foisted certain of the Jack Cade scenes into the second part of *Henry VI*" (xiii). Still he thought that D's passages had "individual qualities which mark them off sharply from the rest of the play"—about which, he presumed, D knew little or nothing. D's characters are "unrecognizable." In this Greg was surely mistaken. There are far too many indications that this D author knew whereof he wrote and in fact participated throughout the play.

Greg is correct, however, in stating that Scene 6 is marked off "sharply" from the rest of the play, but this is due to the unique nature of this scene, not to a difference in style.<sup>5</sup>

Back in Scene 3, Surrey suggested More as the one person whose powers of persuasion might quiet the aggrieved citizens and forestall violence. By Scene 6 the violence has erupted, with buildings burned and other crimes committed, including the releasing of prisoners from jail. More is called upon to deliver what had been promised earlier on his behalf by Surrey, only now in a far worse situation, since the citizens have been joined by the released prisoners plus apprentices out for a May Day lark. More must attempt to calm a mixed and uncontrollable mob, one guilty of criminal acts—to convince them to surrender peacefully and submit to authority and punishment, something that cannot be accomplished by anything short of a stunningly eloquent oration. Yet More (and his author) delivered, cleverly winning the mob's sympathy, sentence by sentence, to his purpose. Nowhere else in the play is there such an oration, nor would one have been appropriate. It is the particular nature of Scene 6, its extreme demands on the rhetorical skills of its author, that sets it apart from the rest of the play, not its style.

One section of More's address that seems too integral to the plot to have been produced by an outside author, is where he tells the crowd that they have sinned against God himself in breaking the King's law—the King whom God has installed: ". . . for to the king god hath his office lent of dread of Justice, power and Command hath bid him rule, and willed you to obey. . . ."

Later, when More himself refuses to obey the King, Surrey muses, "tis strange that my lord Chancellor should refuse the duty that the law of God bequeaths unto the King." Could this fine bit of dramatic irony be purely accidental?

The D scene, always promoted as “the play’s best,” resembles a similar “best scene” in *Julius Caesar*: Act III, Scene 2, where Mark Antony begins his famous oration: “Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears,” so like Surrey who begins: “friends masters Countrymen . . . .” Just as Mark Antony plays on the emotions of the Roman crowd, swaying them to his purpose, so does More. Their aims, however, are very different: More speaks to calm an angry mob; Antony to incite a peaceful gathering to violence. In *Caesar* the Romans were soon raging and shouting “Fire the . . . houses”!—the same cry made by the citizens in Scene 4 of *More*.

Comparisons of these two scenes show too many similarities to be accidental.

### Exit Munday as author

Greg was convinced that S of the fair copy could not have been its author. S made very few errors—but those he made are telling. Greg mentions one of these only by way of a textual footnote. In Scene 11, Lady More describes her ominous dream (which we’ll repeat in full, to give a bit of the flavor of the play):

. . . tonight, I had the strangest dream, that ere my sleep was troubled with. Me thought twas night, and that the King and Queen went on the Thames, in Barges to hear music: My Lord and I were in a little boat me thought, Lord, Lord, what strange things live in slumbers? And being near, we grappled to the Barge that bare the King. But after many pleasing voices spent, in that still moving music house: me thought, the violence of the stream [the tidal flow] did sever us quite from the golden fleet, and hurried us, unto the bridge, which with unused horror, we entered at full tide, thence some flight [sic] shoot [chute], being carried by the waves: our boat stood still just opposite the Tower, and there it turned, and turned about, as when a whirl-pool sucks the circled waters: me thought we both cried, till that we sunk, where arm in arm we died.

Dyce’s earlier printing, Greg noted, had emended “flight” to “slight,” since “slight” was obviously the correct word in its context, the copyist having taken the Elizabethan long s for an f, even though his reading makes no sense in the context.

Another such error is so glaring that no author could possibly have made it. Speaking to his daughter in Scene 16, More says:

Ever retain thy virtuous modesty That modesty is such a comely garment, as it is never out of fashis: sits as fair, upon the meaner woman, as the Empress.

In explaining the nonsense word *fashis*, Greg suggests that in the rough draft of the passage, the word ended with the standard abbreviation for a word ending in “on,” that is, an o topped with a tilde—*fashiō*—which the copyist then mistook for an s. Since this is a mistake that no author would make about his own intention, Greg concludes: “I shall therefore assume, what has indeed I think been the general view, that the original text of the play is not autograph” (xiv); i.e. it is not in its author’s handwriting.

But how could any copyist, especially one as literate as Anthony Munday, have failed to catch so obvious a construction as “out of fashion”? Perhaps the OED will explain Munday’s bewilderment. Shakespeare is credited with the coinages of both phrases “in fashion” and “out of fashion”:

JC:           Slaying is the word, it is a deed in fashion. (V.5.4)

AW:           Virginity, like an old courtier, wears her cap out of fashion (I.1.156)

In *Cymbeline*, poor Imogen, whose virtue is falsely called in question, calls herself “a garment out of fashion.” And in three other plays Shakespeare uses the phrase “out of fashion” four more times, creating new shades of meaning for the word. Since, according to Greg, some versions of the secretarial hand lend themselves to confusing an ð with an s (xvi), Munday, confronted with something unfamiliar, simply guessed. There couldn’t be a stronger piece of evidence than this nonsense word “fashis” that Munday himself was not the author of S.

### Issues of religion

Throughout the play, the author treats More with the utmost sympathy. He is portrayed as witty, wise, learned, honest, generous, compassionate, pleasant, brave, modest—every good quality of personality, mind, and character to be desired in a hero. He is respected, honored, and loved by all who know him well, while those who meet him briefly are overcome with admiration and sorrow that he will be executed. More’s contumacy is noted but forgiven; even King Henry is ready to forgive him and to restore his royal favor. Surrey remains his steadfast friend to the very block, then pictures More’s ascent to Heaven. Likewise the Bishop of Rochester, who also died for his Catholic faith, is treated by the dramatist with sympathy and respect—even given his own scene for a fuller display of his own fine qualities.

Yet, from all accounts, Anthony Munday appears to have been violently and vitriolically anti-Catholic! How could he possibly have presented these Henrican Catholic martyrs in so favorable a light considering how viciously he attacked the Elizabethan martyr Edmund Campion in 1581?

The DNB tells how Munday visited Rome in 1578, following which he wrote *The English Roman Life* to vilify the Catholic seminary for Englishmen “and other matters calculated to excite the animosity of protestant readers.” He also wrote five tracts exposing the “horrible and unnatural treasons” of Catholics in England. In his description of Edmund Campion’s capture he “did all he could to discredit” the Jesuits. In his role as prosecution witness he reported Campion’s horrific execution in language that was soon condemned for its “savageness and bigotry.” In 1582 he was employed by Richard Topcliffe “to guard and take bonds of recusants.”

Can we believe that the writer who so viciously abused Catholics and the widely-respected and scholarly Edmund Campion was the same writer who endowed Sir Thomas More with every virtue? Surely unthinkable, for those willing to think. The very existence of the *More* text in Munday’s hand demands an explanation.

There is an explanation: Munday made the fair copy at the behest of someone he did not care

to deny and most wished to please, his employer, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford. But of course this will not do for those who must have Shakspere of Stratford as the author of Munday's fair copy.

In a reply to a 1995 article by Oxfordian scholar Richard Desper, Stratfordian Thomas Merriam states:

As the Archbishop of Canterbury's chief pursuivant and Topcliffe's right-hand man, Munday knew *in advance* that *Sir Thomas More* should be censored by the Master of Revels. He knew *in advance* that his position of trust as Queen's Messenger was not, and would not be jeopardized by his involvement with the play. The explanation is that Munday copied the work of another author(s) in order either to ingratiate himself so as to set a later trap for those involved, or more likely as *agent provocateur*, to encourage them to incriminate themselves by facilitating the play. ("Accuser" html)

Merriam does not say who were "those involved," presumably the original author (whom he believes was Shakespeare) and the scribes who either produced Shakespeare's revisions or wrote some of their own. He concludes:

Although a marginal literary figure, Anthony Munday was a linchpin in the government's surveillance of the public stage. Shakespeare was undoubtedly aware of his presence and took the needed corrective action.

Merriam does not suggest what this "needed corrective action" might have been. He cites Vittorio Gabrieli who had "expressed admiration for the skill with which the author(s) . . . utilized the play's sources, some of which were circulated privately among recusants in manuscript." Merriam continues:

Several of the play's references to this literature are matters of minute detail. I have argued that, had he obtained them through confiscation as Gabrieli and Melchiori surmise, Munday would not have sufficiently immersed himself in these sources to pick up and transcribe their minutiae.

An excellent point! Would Munday have bothered to study this decidedly pro-Catholic literature so closely? (We could tell Merriam of a certain playwright who was for a time a practicing Catholic.) Merriam informs us further:

No authority dates *Sir Thomas More* earlier than 1591; most scholars favor 1593. The play's high proportion of feminine endings makes even 1593 early for what, at the time, was a Shakespearean prosodic feature.

Merriam, of course, is using the orthodox dating of Shakespeare's plays, which is imposed by the biography of Shakspere of Stratford. Oxfordians, on the other hand, will find no problem with accepting earlier datings of Shakespeare plays high in feminine endings.

### Munday Oxford's servant

We can be certain that Munday's association with Oxford began prior to his trip abroad in 1578 because his dedication to Oxford of his book *The Mirror of Mutability* (licensed October 19, 1579) states that he had delivered for Oxford's "perusing" his translation of *Galien of France* before "taking on the habit of a traveler" (Chiljan 35). Here Munday addressed Oxford as his "Singular Good Lord and Patron," and, after some description of his travels in France and Italy, concluded with poems based on the initials of Oxford's name, title, and family motto, ending with: "Until [together again] we enjoy friendly conversation" (39).

It is clear that Munday had entered Oxford's "service" by 1580 when he published his *View of Sundry Examples* in which "he refers to himself as 'servant to the right honourable the Earl of Oxenford'" (DNB). Also in 1580 he published the novel *Zelauto* which he dedicated to Oxford, again styling himself on its title page: "A.M., servant to the Right Honorable the Earl of Oxenford" (44). These two 1580 uses of the word "servant"—not addressed to Oxford himself, but to the reading public—would have been impertinent had they not described his actual status.

The period of Munday's actual employment was probably fairly short, ending in 1581 with the reversal of Oxford's fortunes. It was certainly over by 1582 when he began his anti-Catholic duties under Topcliffe. In 1588 he referred to his former status as Oxford's "servant" in the dedication to Oxford of his translation of the first part of *Palmerin d'Oliva* in which he addresses him as "Right Noble Lord and Sometime my Honorable Master," ending "Sometime Your Honor's servant yet continuing in all humble duty." The letter deals with the opprobrium deserved by a former servant who neglects to honor his former master. Munday, "being once so happy as to serve a master so noble . . . I present Your Honor the willing endeavor of your late servant" (76). As late as 1619 Munday would remind the eighteenth Earl of his former service: "Sir, having sometime served that most Noble Earl your father . . ." (100).

Such statements by Munday prove beyond question that he was employed by Oxford from late 1579 at the earliest, ending at the latest in early 1582. Only during this time can we imagine Munday performing a duty that, based on his anti-Catholic activities, must have been odious for him—copying out a play that featured Sir Thomas More as a hero and Bishop Fisher of Rochester dying heroically for his Roman Catholic faith. In any case there is nothing beyond orthodox imagination to contradict a date for the original *More* play of c.1581.

### Enter the Earl of Oxford

Oxford's links to the play are manifold. Not only was the original copyist his employee, but "Surrey," the play's second most important character, was his uncle-by-marriage.<sup>6</sup> That Oxford was commenting on his own condition might be suggested by certain gratuitous observations about poets, such as that in Scene 16 where Sir Thomas More remarks on the small estate he will soon leave behind:

That part of Poet that was given me Made me a very unthrift. for this is the disease  
attends us all, Poets were never thrifty, never shall.

In the revision of Scene 8 (Hand C, Addition IV), Surrey accuses himself of the same failing in responding to *More*, who had called him “my noble poet”:

Oh my noble Lord, you tax me in that word poet of much Idleness  
it is a study that makes poor our fate  
poets were ever thought unfit for state

That a Poet was a “very unthrift” and was “thought unfit for state” (state office) was a far more apt description of the seventeenth Earl than it was of Sir Thomas More, whose abilities in government office had been amply demonstrated and who had already blamed his relative poverty on his charities to needy soldiers and scholars. That the same thought, written in two different hands, is shared by both leading characters, is another proof that the play was written by a single author. It also suggests that the thought that poets were not good with money and that they were considered unfit for serious office, was something that lay heavy on the author’s mind, as indeed it probably would have on Oxford’s in 1581, when, after a decade at Court, he was still without a post of any tangible importance.

#### “Plodding idiots” v. “the finest stuff”

The generally condescending portrayals of working class characters in *More* would seem to rule out either Munday or Shakspere as author. The first seven scenes are largely devoted to ordinary citizens and tradesmen who feel oppressed by foreign residents because they are stealing their jobs and abusing them. The dramatist gives them the fine patriotic instincts of “true” Englishmen and women. But they go too far and forget their “obedience,” being only “simple men” (as *More* describes them in Scene 5, Addition II). Doll speaks in Scene 1:

Doll: I am ashamed that free born Englishmen, having beaten strangers  
within their own bounds should thus be brav’d and abused by them  
at home.

Sherwin: It is not our lack of courage in the cause, but the strict obedience  
that we are bound to . . . how to redress yours or mine own [wrong] is a  
matter beyond all our abilities.

Note Doll’s “bounds” and Sherwin’s “bound,” a typically Shakespearean use of one word in more than one sense.

From his lofty position as a peer the Earl of Surrey speaks about the citizens in Scene 3:

But if the English blood be once but up, as I perceive their hearts already full I fear me  
much, before their spleens be cooled, some of these saucy Aliens for their pride, will

pay for't soundly, wheresoere it lights. this tide of rage, that with the Eddy strives: I fear me much will drown too many lives.

Note the blood-hearts-spleen medical imagery and the watery imagery of tide-eddy-drown. There are several such watery examples, yet another indication that in the original play and in new material in Hands C and D, all were composed by the same author.

In Scene 4, Lincoln, the citizens' leader, addresses his now-armed forces. One might think his eloquent mini-oration sufficient to rally the troops for a *Henry V* battle:

Come gallant bloods, you, whose free souls do scorn to bear th'enforced wrongs of Aliens. Add rage to resolution, fire the houses of these audacious strangers . . . Shall these enjoy more privilege than we in our own country? lets then become their slaves. Since justice keeps not them in greater awe we[']ll be ourselves rough ministers at law.

When they do get "rough" on the foreigners and on London, their violence elicits this observation from Surrey (Addition II):

oh power what art thou in a madmans eyes thou makst the plodding Idiot Bloody wise

While "power"—mob-power—is the culprit, what "servant" or citizen author would refer to his fellows as "plodding idiots"?

Hear Doll once more, speaking from the scaffold in Scene 7:

Now let me tell the women of this town,  
No stranger yet brought doll to lying down.  
So long as I an Englishman can see,  
Nor french nor dutch shall get a kiss of me.  
And when that I am dead, for me yet say,  
I died in scorn to be a strangers prey.

These citizens are fired with an admirable English spirit, but is the playwright one of them? Is he portraying his own kind?

The foreigner de Bard had commandeered both the stock of plate and the wife of the goldsmith Sherwin. Tiring of the wife, this cad returned her, along with a bill for her board. When Sherwin did not pay it, de Bard sued him and had him arrested. Although the courtiers sympathize with the abused goldsmith, they find the circumstances too amusing to resist some witty pleasantries. Surrey quips, "The more Knave Bard, that using Sherwins goods, doth ask him interest for the occupation" (note the legal terminology, with the wife included among the "goods"). He likens the misused wife to "a well pac'd horse" and continues: "If these hot frenchmen needsly will have sport, they should in kindness yet defray the charge." Since this sort of verbal sport at the citizen's expense is genuinely funny, it seems the author intended his earls to be taken for delightfully witty gentlemen, not arrogant snobs.



Later Sir Thomas More, now knighted and made Lord Chancellor, appears quite sensitive to—or is it about?—his origins. In Hand C he soliloquizes:

good god good god that I from such an humble bench of birth  
should step as twere up to my countrys head . . .

“Humble bench of birth?” More was born to a substantial gentry family with a father who was knighted and educated in the Law and who obtained for his youthful son an enviable position in the household of no less a person than the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Chancellor Morton. What was unusual about More’s own appointment to this high office was not his rank, but the fact that he was the first non-cleric so named. Many if not most previous Lord Chancellors had risen to their high positions from genuinely lowly origins. More’s immediate predecessor, Cardinal Wolsey, was the son of an Ipswich butcher. More’s “humble bench of birth” would have seemed “humble” only to a member of the nobility.

In the original “More in melancholy” speech of Scene 13, More’s view of the world is thoroughly aristocratic:

Here sits my wife, and  
dear esteemed issue, yonder stand  
my loving Servants, now the difference  
twixt those and these . . .

I conceive, that Nature hath sundry metals,  
out of which she frames us mortals. . .

Of the finest stuff, the finest features come, the rest of earth,  
receive base fortunes even before their birth.  
Hence slaves have their creation and I think,  
Nature provides content for the base mind,  
under the whip, the burden and the toil,  
their low wrought bodies drudge in patience. . .

what means or misery from our birth doth flow,  
Nature entitles to us, that we owe [own] . . .

Among More’s “loving Servants” standing “yonder” are both his Steward and his “learned Secretary,” yet despite their education and responsible positions in his household, they are still no more than “earth,” their “base fortunes” that of “drudging slaves.” Naturally this viewpoint is repugnant to moderns; but even in the sixteenth century, what kind of author would have allowed his most admirable character such opinions; probably not one who was himself a “learned Secretary,” certainly not a yeoman’s son—only one who held the same opinions himself, a nobleman.

With two exceptions, the servants seem to accept their lot as lesser beings. In Scene 9 one of the servant-players cautions against meddling with matters that do not concern them. In Scene 15

we hear several of More's good, loyal, but simple servants trying to work out perplexities beyond their comprehension. The Butler says, "I cannot tell, I have nothing to do with matters above my capacity." The Brewer says, "Soft man, we are not discharged yet, my Lord may come home again, and all will be well." The Butler has doubts: "I much mistrust it, when they go to raining once, there's ever foul weather for a great while after."

### "My lord a player"?

Faukner is the one true exception, but his exalted self-image is a function of the humorous nature of his character. Faukner is brought before More for his part in a street disturbance:



*Sir Thomas More*

More: Fellow, whose man are you . . . .

Faukner: I serve next under god and my prince mr morris secretary to my Lord of winchester . . . . the fray was between the Bishops men of Ely and winchester. and I could not in honor but part them. I thought it stood not with my reputation and degree . . . .

When told to get his hair cut Faukner replies, "[I']ll not lose a hair to be Lord Chancellor of Europe." It seems apparent that the author of the C revision could hardly bear to let his enlarged creation exit the stage; he's retained even longer in the Hand E Addition. This one character, a mere servant to a secretary, is allowed a spirited mind, a vivid imagination, and clever wit. What a sharp contrast to the wit of the servant-players who talk together in the Addition VI extension of Scene 9, Hand B! Speaking of More, "Luggins" says, "god bless him I would there were more of his mind a loves our quality and yet hes a learned man and knows what the world is." Having received a bonus for their performance, the Clown adds, "and many such Rewards would make us all ride and horse us with the best nags in smithfield." One wonders how actors asked to play this scene would have felt about this portrayal of their "quality."

Randall is another servant who thinks too well of himself, and wrongly so. Remember that he has been disguised as the Lord Chancellor while More stands by in plain attire in order to trick the visiting Erasmus. More advises Randall to speak as little as possible because his words might "betray" his low station. Once garbed in More's robe and gold chain, however, Randall already feels like a mighty lord and assures his master that he can carry it off. But when Erasmus arrives with Surrey (who joins in the gag, perhaps from a signal from More), Randall, warming to his role, chats with Erasmus in increasingly-suspicious terms. By his third short speech he has betrayed himself: "by god I love a parlous wise fellow that smells of a politician. better than a long progress." At which point Surrey feels he must interfere: "we are deluded. this is not his Lordship." Still Randall manages to question the great Dutch scholar on a matter of importance: "I pray you Erasmus how long will the

holland cheese in your Country keep without maggots”? “Fool” cries More, “painted Barbarism retire thyself Into thy first creation. . . .”

Rather an unkind dismissal, one would think, after his command performance. But was it kind of Prince Hal to tease the hapless tapster Francis? In Shakespeare as in *More* it is the servants and lower classes who are most often the butt of the author’s humor.

One passage in particular between servants may interest Oxfordians. At the end of Scene 9 when the players are left alone on stage, one says,

do ye hear fellows? would not my Lord make a rare player? Oh, he would uphold a company beyond all . . . did ye mark how extemptrically he fell to the matter, and spake Lugginses part, almost as it is in the very book set down.

Another cautions him:

Peace, do ye know what ye say? my Lord a player? let us not meddle with any such matters. . . .

No indeed!

### Why Surrey?

Among the play’s several anachronisms, it is the presence of Surrey, onstage throughout most of the play, that raises the most questions. Sobran refers to Surrey as a “prominent” character, something of an understatement since Surrey’s part is second only to More’s in importance, and is, in fact, more important in terms of forwarding the plot. In Scene 3 it is Surrey who introduces “Master More, one of the Sheriffs, a wise and learned Gentleman” whose “gentle and persuasive speech” might prevail with the citizens “more than we can with power,” a speech which initiates More’s rise from Sheriff to Lord Chancellor. And Surrey is the one who enters just in the nick of time to save all but the leader of the uprising from the gallows in Scene 7, the one who speaks the magic words: “from my dread Sovereigns lips, I here pronounce free pardon for them all.”

Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, the eldest surviving son of Thomas Howard, third Duke of Norfolk, was born c.1517, the year of the play’s opening action, far too early for the part he’s given in the play. It was in fact his father, Norfolk, who was the friend of Sir Thomas More. For some reason the author substituted the son for the father, moving him up in time so he could interact with More in much the same way that Shakespeare moved Hotspur back in time to interact with Prince Hal. Hotspur provided a needed dramatic foil for Hal, but why replace Norfolk with his son?

The reason may be revealed in Scene 8, where the three great writers are brought together to provide a veritable feast of “the Muses.” The “English honored poet” Surrey tells Erasmus that “this little Isle holds not a truer friend unto the Arts” than More, who is “the best linguist that we have



Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey

in England.” Erasmus then addresses in Latin the man he believes to be More, in reality Randall in disguise. Their further conversation in the original scene is missing from the manuscript, but continues in the Hand C revision of Scene 8. Erasmus is given a mere seven lines in the three-way discussion of scholarly topics.

After Surrey gives the lines ending: “poets were ever thought unfit for State,” More protests:

More: O give not up fair poesy sweet Lord to such Contempt. that I may speak my heart It is the sweetest heraldry of art that sets a difference tween the tough sharp holly and tender bay tree.

Surrey: yet my lord. It is become the very Lag in numbers to all mechanic sciences.

More: why I[']ll show the reason this is no age for poets. They should sing to the loud Cannon Heroica facta qui faciunt reges heroica Carmina lawdant<sup>7</sup> and as great subjects of their pen decay even so unphysicked they do melt away. . . .  
we[']ll Banquet here with fresh and staid delights  
the muses music here shall cheer our sprites [spirits]  
the cates must be but mean where scholars sit.  
For theyre made all with courses of neat wit.

In these remarks we may be hearing the author’s personal opinions on the state of the poetic arts in his own time.

Apart from More, Surrey is the most likeable, and the wittiest of the courtiers portrayed. He is also More’s truest friend. As the former Lord Chancellor is led away to the Tower in Scene 14, it is Surrey who bids him farewell:

Surrey: farewell dear friend, I hope your safe return.

More: My Lord, and my dear fellow in the Muses  
farewell, farewell most noble Poet

It would seem that the dramatist had a personal affection for the Earl of Surrey.

### Offstage presences

The play has three large off-stage presences. God is invoked throughout in both casual oaths and pious thoughts by all classes. (These characters swear like Shakespeare’s, too. For example, one of the common oaths, “before God,” “afore God,” “fore God,” appears in both in all three versions.)

Though the King/Prince/Sovereign, is never named, he is described throughout as gracious, bountiful, and merciful. At the last minute he would still forgive More if he would sign those

“Articles.” There is, however, one startling exception in Scene 13 to this idyllic portrait, one which must have escaped from the dramatist’s personal awareness of the true nature of Henry VIII:

As for the Prince, in all his sweet gorged maw and his rank flesh that sinfully renews  
the noons excess in the nights dangerous surfeits . . .

The thought breaks off. The entire passage was replaced by Addition I. A “rank flesh” image of King Henry was not in accordance with the play’s vision of the King, as in More’s riot speech:

for to the king god hath his office lent of dread of Justice, power and Command hath  
bid him rule, and willed you to obey and to add ampler majesty to this he hath not  
only lent the king his figure his throne his sword, but given him his own name calls  
him a god on earth.

The play’s third unseen presence is never mentioned, but certainly looms large offstage from the middle of Scene 10 to the end, namely the Pope in Rome, spiritual head of the Roman Catholic Church and, according to that faith, God’s representative on earth. Their belief that the Pope had the authority to intervene between God and King was the reason neither the Bishop of Rochester nor More felt they could sign those “Articles.”

Of those present at the Scene 10 Council meeting, only the Bishop and More will not sign the “Articles”; Surrey does so first and “Instantly,” wondering that More “should refuse the duty that the law of God bequeaths unto the King.” God’s law, in Surrey’s view, proclaims the King’s authority and his subjects’ obedience to it. Shrewsbury suggests that More’s “mind will alter, and the Bishops too. Error in learned heads hath much to do.” More has made an “error” in his choice of allegiance—to the Pope and Roman Church—improperly intruding (in their view) between God and Monarch. Surrey sadly reiterates that key word “error” in the play’s last speech: “A very learned worthy Gentleman seals error with his blood.”

While this play is not an anti-Catholic vehicle, neither is it a defense of Roman Catholicism, which is implied to be in “error.” And yet, through their belief in it, two completely sympathetic characters have made and paid for their “error.” From the foot of the scaffold Surrey urgently pleaded with More to “hold conference with your soul”—to no avail. More’s mind did not alter—he chose Pope over Prince. This play may have been a defense of—or an apology for—those fine and worthy men who had been led into “error.” Or perhaps for one man whose mind did alter before it was too late?

### **Oxford’s Catholicism**

More’s downfall as depicted in the play closely reflects Oxford’s own troubles of 1581. In late December of 1580, Oxford demonstrated his own choice of Prince over Pope by publicly confessing his secret Roman Catholicism to Queen Elizabeth. Four months later he was lodged in the Tower,

as More had been.<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, both had words with a Tower official about the surrender of a garment (Ward 211).

Oxford's brief period of conversion to Roman Catholicism seems to have ended when messages came from papal offices to the effect that the assassination of Elizabeth would not be considered a sin for her Catholic subjects. Whatever his level of involvement in Catholicism at this time, it is clear that it did not go so far as to include doing away with the Queen. Still, while spending time with his cousin Henry Howard and other Catholic friends he must have had access to the manuscripts that were secretly passed from one Catholic family to another, manuscripts such as Roper's *Life of Sir Thomas More*, many versions of which are known to have been in circulation at this time.<sup>9</sup> Roper's *Life* was a known source of the play.

Oxford's attraction to Sir Thomas More is easy to understand. More was a true "Renaissance man," a near perfect "Courtier." Widely accomplished, a lover of art and music, the learned and witty More was a prolific writer in a number of genres. His works dealing with religion approached that topic in various styles. He wrote poems and at least one play. His language was both high and low, including coarse jests. More gained lasting literary fame through his Latin opus *Utopia*. Its first English translation in 1551 was dedicated to William Cecil, then an important secretary in the Regency for Edward VI.

#### A "large and spacious" house

The play includes two minor characters that are almost as anachronistic as the Earl of Surrey: Sir Roger Cholmley and Sir Thomas Palmer—such minor figures during Henry's reign that neither is mentioned by Neville Williams or Carolly Erickson, historians of the period. DNB articles indicate that both were away from Court, even out of England, during the years of the play's action. Why would the author of *More* include these two unknown and anachronistic knights?

The answer, again, may lie with the Earl of Oxford. Both knights were involved in affairs of state later, during the reign of Edward VI, the period when Oxford's guardian, William Cecil, rose to prominence. When Mary Tudor took the throne, their fates were tied with that of Northumberland. Palmer was executed along with Northumberland, while Cholmley, barely missing the same fate, continued to live until 1565.

Cecil too was endangered at first by Mary's accession. But Cecil not only survived and prospered, he managed to acquire the mansion that Palmer had begun to build on the monastic lands he had obtained during the period of the Regency Council. This mansion, located on the north side of the Strand, conveniently close to Westminster and Whitehall, was described by the historian John Stowe as: "Of brick and timber, very large and spacious, but of later time . . . far more beautifully increased by the late Sir William Cecil, baron of Burghley" (Ward 16).

It was to this mansion, and the surrounding fields and gardens of the area now known as Covent Garden, that Oxford was sent after the death of his father in 1562. This was Cecil House, Oxford's home from age twelve until he was old enough to live on his own as an adult.

### The provenance of the manuscript

“The Book of Sir Thomas More” is MS Harley 7368 in the British Library, where four copies of Roper’s *Life* are also to be found (among the Harleian manuscripts 6166, 6254, 6362, and 7030). Within this same series, Harley 7392 includes copies of three known and two possible Oxford poems (May 238).

The Harleian Manuscripts were amassed in the early eighteenth century by Sir Robert Harley, first Earl of Oxford of the second creation, and his son Edward Harley, the second Earl. The Harleys were not descended from the original Oxford earls, but Edward’s wife, Lady Henrietta Cavendish Holles Harley, had de Vere ancestry (Anderson ix). It appears that while she added to the collection of manuscripts, her passion for family antiquities may have influenced some of her husband’s purchases as well. After his death in 1741, Lady Henrietta began selling off his collections: “curiosities,” coins, medals, the portraits he had inherited or bought, “about 50,000 printed books, 41,000 prints, and 350,000 pamphlets.” (The famous Harleian Miscellany—not to be confused with the Manuscripts—consists of some of these pamphlets and tracts.)

According to the DNB, Lady Harley “passed her widowhood . . . in arranging the ancestral portraits and attaching inscriptions to them, and in gathering together all the other memorials she could discover of the various ‘great families which centred in herself,’” “memorials” contained in . . . the Harleian Manuscripts, including 14,236 original rolls, charters, deeds and other legal documents relating to her ancestral heritage.<sup>10</sup>

Lady Henrietta would have obtained these “other memorials” of the “great families” from whom she was descended from her own relatives and family connections. Very likely she would have requested all the old manuscripts they cared to add to her collection. She may have obtained some ancestral portraits from her relatives as well. And where did Lady Harley spend her thirteen-year widowhood while compiling and organizing this collection? At the Harley’s estate of Welbeck, where she is said to have spent £40,000 in improvements—Welbeck, the source of the one unquestionably authentic portrait of the seventeenth Earl of Oxford!

### Oxford “in composition”

Oxford’s many connections to the play *Sir Thomas More* suggest that he was its author. Although his “hand” is not one of the play’s six copyists, the hand that copied the original version is that of a writer who we know was in his employ during the brief period suggested by the play’s topical references. The anachronistic uses of two characters with personal connections to Oxford: his uncle the Earl of Surrey and Sir Thomas Palmer, who built the mansion in which he lived as a youth, the wry references to poets like himself as “unthrifths” and so unfit for state office, the probable use of secretaries to take dictation, the sympathetic treatment of Catholics, the overall aristocratic tone, all point his way. Added to these is the fact that the manuscript was discovered among documents that include three (and probably five) of his poems, which came from the location of his only certain portrait. And when these are added to the many reasons put forth by orthodox scholars for

attributing *More* to Shakespeare, we see that a new and important dimension has been added to the argument for Oxford as author of the Shakespeare canon.

Yet, however important *More* may prove to be in the authorship debate, even more exciting to Oxfordian scholars must be the revelations about the process by which Oxford/Shakespeare composed his plays. It demonstrates how energetically he revised, although the tedious task of producing the fair copy was something he assigned to a secretary, in this case, Anthony Munday. With improvements in mind, Munday's neat transcription got turned into a mere working draft, marked up and worked over by the two scribes now taking his dictation. With the revisions and added passages tacked in place, the play was passed along to the censor, the Master of the Revels.

Had Tilney approved it, *More* would have been further polished and a new fair copy prepared for the actors. Once fair copies were finished, the earlier rough drafts would probably have been destroyed. We might assume that those immortal plays staged and published during Oxford's lifetime had undergone some similar process.

But Tilney had *not* approved it. On the contrary, he had required such draconian cuts and changes that *More* was left as is, unperfected. That the manuscript exists today is probably due to its author's habit of keeping unfinished or imperfect plays for possible future use, plus the fact that there was enough room in the ancestral mansions of the English nobility that vast quantities of old papers of all sorts would be allowed to accumulate undisturbed for centuries.

Most exciting are the insights into the author's habits of revision provided by the Additions. We can see for ourselves how several scenes were greatly improved, though sometimes at the expense of equally worthy lines. Had *More* been completed, other scenes might have benefitted from this "sweat" of "the second heat" as Ben Jonson described Shakespeare's habits of revision in his First Folio poem. We would perhaps have gained another Shakespeare play. But we would also have lost the opportunity we now have to visualize Oxford at work, speaking lines aloud for a scribe to record—then, as he heard them recited back to him, pondering further changes, a method that guaranteed that the lines would sound as sweetly in a listener's ear as in a reader's mind.

Still, in my opinion the greatest thrill of all comes to those who read Addition I from the Greg text. Here is recorded every change of wording, every different approach as the author's thoughts take a new direction. These nuances in particular show us "Shakespeare in Composition"—of Oxford's play *Sir Thomas More*. \_\_\_\_\_ 🍷



Notes

- 1 *Fair copy* is the term for the final copy of a written work, the one intended for reading by others. For those who could afford one, this was a job for their secretary.
- 2 More of Merriam's thoughts can be found in his article, "The Misunderstanding of Munday as Author of *Sir Thomas More*." See a summary of Merriam's findings in Ogburn 676-7.
- 3 Intrigued by the Merriam tests, Oxfordians also began to endorse the idea that "Shake-speare" wrote *More*, including Charlton Ogburn, Jr., Dr. Gordon Cyr, and more recently Joseph Sobran. Wayne Shore, an Oxfordian scholar who specializes in stylometry, says that his system to date can only eliminate and not determine, but *More* is still in his running as potentially Shakespearean.
- 4 Play quotations here are taken from the best source, the 1911 manuscript study of Walter W. Greg, *The Book of Sir Thomas More*, which was reissued in 1961. Greg's masterful work corrected numerous textual errors in earlier printings of *More*: Alexander Dyce's of 1844 and Tucker Brooke's in *The Shakespearean Apochrypha* of 1908. Greg called Brooke's introduction "perfunctory and inaccurate." His own occupies some 24 pages and is full of valuable information, as are his copious footnotes.  
Greg transcribed or noted every letter and mark of the manuscript, including all words or passages marked for omission. He named the six scribal hands: S (of the fair copy, not yet identified as Munday), and A, B, C, D, and E. Previously scene changes were indicated only by means of stage directions; Greg numbered the scenes i through xvii, (here: 1-17). Scene 8 has a revision that makes its sequence of action unclear so Greg divided it into a and b, but this distinction will be ignored. Spelling is modernized here except where indicated. Capitalization and punctuation, or lack thereof, are as in the manuscript. (Bracketed apostrophes are used to clarify otherwise confusing contractions.)
- 5 Unfortunately the original text of this part of Scene 6 was written on a page or pages now missing from the manuscript, and it is impossible to know the extent of the revision written out by Hand D.
- 6 Joseph Sobran's *SOS Newsletter* article "Oxford's Uncle Henry" brought this to the attention of Oxfordians who had not previously been made aware of its significance.
- 7 Latin for : "Heroic kings [will or must] do what heroic poems praise." Thanks to Oxfordian scholar William Jansen for the translation.
- 8 Not, however, for his treasonable dabbling with Catholicism, but for impregnating the Queen's Maid of Honor.
- 9 Roper's *Life of More* was not published until 1626, and then in Paris.
- 10 The DNB article on Edward Harley lists these documents separately from the 7,639 bound manuscript volumes, but this is the British Museum's cataloguing, with no indication of how Lady Henrietta had her mass of papers sorted. However organized, she obviously considered all these manuscripts as a single collection. "That the manuscripts might not be dispersed, Lady Oxford parted with them in 1753 [just two years before her death] to the nation for the insignificant sum of £10,000. They now form the Harleian collection in the British Museum." (DNB, Harley, E.)

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