Is This Manuscript in Shakespeare's Writing?

Expert Believes Pages of a Play, "Sir Thomas More," Were Written by the Bard's Own Hand

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Page of the Play "Sir Thomas More," Said to be in Shakespeare's Handwriting.

All marry god forbid that—

any certain yor ar for to the king god hath his office lent of dread of Justice, power and Comand hath bid him rule, and wilde yor to obey to add ampler mathe to this be [good] last not [ne] and that the king his figure his throne [bys] & sword, but given him his owne name calls him a god on earth, what do yor then flying against that he god himself entalls but syze against god, what do yor to yor solewes in doing this so deeper as ye may wash your sole myads [wars] and those same hande that yor lyke rebels lift against the peace lift vp for peace, and your reverente knees [that] make them your feet to kneele to be forgiven [is sater waits, then ever yor can make]

[whose discipline is ryot 3 why eu yor [warch] hurly]

[cannot peace but by obedience] what rebell captaine as mutynes ar incident, by his name can still the rout who will obey [th] a truytor or howe can well that pelimination sounde when ther is no sedition but a rebel—

to qualify a rebell, yeole put digge strangers kill them call their throts' possess their howses and lade the matte of lawe in lion

to slipp him lyke a hound 3 [saying] say nowe the king as he is clement, ye thoffender moore should so much com to short of your great trespas as bet to banished yor, whether would yor go, what Circuitry by the nature of yor error should give you baryge your go to flite for flunders to any famar gwine, [to] space or portiggay say any where [why] yor that not adhere to Ingland why yor must need bee strangers, yor yor be pleaded to find a nation of such barbarous temper that breaking out in bloudy violence

—would not aodr yor, an abode on earth whet their detested knaves against yor throttes spyme yor lyke dogg3, and lyke as yf that god owed not nor made not yor, nor that the element3 was not all apposivist to [ther] yor Comfoete, but Charte3 worth yor, that would thonce think to be thus vyd, this is the strangers case and this your mountainous inhumableness

faith a saics trewe lets vs do as we may doon by weele be ruled by yor master moore yor yeade stand our field to cure our ploone

Submit yor to thine noble gentlemen entreate their mediation to the kinge give vp yor selfe to forme obey the malestere and there no doubt, but mercy may be found yf yor so seek

Page Decribed.

The subject of Shakespeare's handwriting has never been submitted to a thorough and systematic study, and the reason for this neglect is not far to seek. There is a quite recent date free authentic signatures of the dramatist constituted the only recognized material so far as to found an opinion or to build up a theory as to the character of the handwriting. The evidence of any such signatures, consisting of literary creations to paper might have been before the undertaking undertaken taking which could only prove barren in results.

But the discovery in 1916 by Dr. C. W. Wallace, in the course of his researches in the Public Record Office, of a sixth signature of Shakespeare, which is numbered one in the accompanying reproduction:

[Signature Image]
hand, we now know that Shakespeare was capable of writing in fluent style; and we recover the key of this leading factor of the problem.

The material on which we have to work is meagre, but we start with one advantage. We can confine our survey to a single style of calligraphy. Shakespeare was born of provincial parents, citizens of a small country town outside the great city of London. In the grammar school of his native Stratford-upon-Avon when his father's declining fortunes led to the boy's withdrawal, probably in 1577, to help, it is said, in his father's trade, at the early age of 12 years—a period of life when learning is slender and handwriting is usually still unformed. But we know the characteristic of the writing that Shakespeare was taught. In the course of the sixteenth century the handwriting of the educated classes in England was undergoing a radical change. The old native style—a rugged and tortuous style—was gradually giving place to the new Italian hand, founded on the reformed style of the calligraphers of the Italian renaissance, the beauty and simplicity of which insured it in the end its general acceptance.

At the time when Shakespeare was at school the new hand had made its way in England so far that the most highly educated were masters of it as well as of the native hand—they could write in either style. But progress is always slower in the provinces than in the capital, and the evidence of extant specimens of the handwriting of Shakespeare—a few actual contemporaries shows that the writing masters of Stratford were still teaching the old English hand, and that hand alone.

Shakespeare's six authentic signatures are subscribed to the following documents:

1. His deposition in a lawsuit brought by Stephen Bellott against his father-in-law, Christopher Montjoy, a Huguenot "tire maker" of Silver Street, near Wood Street, in the City of London, with whom Shakespeare lodged about the year 1604; dated 11th May, 1612. (Recently discovered by Dr. C. W. Wallace in the Public Record Office.)

2. Conveyance of a house in Blackfriars, London, purchased by Shakespeare; 10th March, 1613. (Now in the Guildhall Library.)

3. Mortgage deed of the same property; 11th March, 1613. (Now in the British Museum.)

4-6. Shakespeare's will, written on three sheets of paper, with his signature at the foot of each one; executed 25th March, 1616. (Now in Somerset House.)

The book adds:

The six signatures—one of them preceded by the words "By me"—present a mosaic total of fourteen words. Subscribed within the last four years of Shakespeare's life, between the 11th of May, 1612, and the 25th of March, 1616, they suffice to prove that at the close of his career he still wrote the native English hand which he had been taught at school.

The actual signatures, so far as the letters are concerned but without incidental remarks added by the writer, are:

1. Wm Shaksp
2. William Shaksper
3. Wm Shakesper
4. William Shakespeare
5. Wm Shakespeare
6. By me William Shaksper

The Christian name is written indifferently in a shortened form or at full length, following the same general custom at all times. It will, however, be noticed that in each of the first three signatures the surname is written in a shortened form; while in Nos. 4-6, subscribed to the will, it is subscribed at full length. The six signatures thus fall into two groups; and this grouping is further emphasized by the fact that those of the first group were written when the writer was presumably in normal health; those of the second group, when he was on his death bed. All are conscious how our handwriting varies with the state of our bodily health; and the effect of Shakespeare's weakened condition upon his signatures in the second group is very painfully manifest.

When the three signatures of the first group are submitted to examination, we find that their value as witnesses to the character of Shakespeare's handwriting is materially reduced by accidental circumstances. In the first place, from the manner in which he has executed the two Blackfriars documents, (Nos. 2 and 3), it is evident that he imagined, as a layman might imagine, that he was writing for a layman. In a fourth case, to confine his signature within the bounds of the parchment label which is inserted in the foot of the deed to carry the seal, and not to allow it to extend on to the parchment of the deed itself.

With signature No. 1 we are on firmer ground, and its evidence for the object of our present study is of first-rate importance.

Sir Edward then goes on to analyze each of the six signatures letter by letter with due regard to the conditions prevailing for each of the six occasions on which Shakespeare wrote his name. He then does the same thing with the individual letters in the "Sir Thomas More" fragment and adds:

Having now analyzed the handwriting of this addition to the play of "Sir Thomas More," we are at length in a position to consider whether the signatures of Shakespeare, which we have been examining together as a whole, are the signatures of the first group of this study, and the three pages of this addition have been made to yield sufficient internal evidence to prove that the documents are in the handwriting of one and the same man.

The problem is not an ordinary one; it is not a simple matter of deciding whether a particular MS. is in a handwriting already ascribed, or which subsequent editions are extant as material for comparison. Here we have to establish the identity of the handwriting of these three pages of the Harleian MS. with another handwriting altogether unknown to us but for the survival of a few signatures, half of which are imperfect. The task may be compared to that of attempting to identify a face in the dark by the dim light of a Lucifer match. But, notwithstanding the difficulties, we venture to think that sufficient close resemblances have been detected to bring the two handwritings together and to identify them as coming from one and the same hand. Personally we feel confident that in this addition to the play of "Sir Thomas More" we have indeed the handwriting of William Shakespeare.