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### Was Munday the Author of *Sir Thomas More* ?

VITTORIO Gabrieli's '*Sir Thomas More* : Source, Characters, Ideas' (*Moreana* No. 90, pp. 17-43) yields an abundant harvest of information, observation and insight with which to stimulate the thoughtful student of the play. So rich is the harvest that it may seem ungrateful to raise objections concerning a single issue, the authorship of the play.

Professor Gabrieli assumes Munday's authorship of *Sir Thomas More*. No justification is given in his essay, and the reader may be curious as to why this is so. There exists a manuscript of the play, the original text of which is written in the same hand as that of a signed holograph of Munday's *John a Kent and John a Cumber*. Both plays were bound in a similar vellum wrapper and stored together. <sup>1</sup> If composing *Sir Thomas More* were a capital offence, Munday could be said to have been caught red-handed.

The holograph manuscript, like the self-indictment in some legal systems, is a desideratum of the professional investigator, the ne plus ultra of attribution. What more could one want ? However, in law, the self-confessed defendant is not always guilty of the crime charged, as the history of torture makes apparent.

Similarly, the manuscript of a text in a known hand is not invariably the composition of the penman. It is assumed that an established writer would never copy in his own hand the work of another man, especially one who was younger and less well-known. If an established playwright were to need a copy, the services of a professional copyist were available to do the work.

In the absence of contradictory evidence, the case for Munday's authorship of *Sir Thomas More* is solid by normal standards of scholarship. In the absence of contradictory evidence, Gabrieli's collection of circumstantial evidence favouring Munday as author would tend to support Munday's claim : thus the author's ability to read the Latin of *Expositio fidelis de morte Thomae Mori* and Stapleton's *Tres Thomae*, the coincidence of the existence of a Morris and Sherwin at the English College in Rome where Munday resided in 1579, the similarity between themes of conscience in *Sir Thomas More* and *Sir John Oldcastle*, the availability of Harpsfield in manuscript from Sir Richard Topclyff, whom Munday had served as an informer.

Not all the circumstantial evidence supports Munday's authorship of *More*. The sympathetic treatment of St. John Fisher cannot be explained by

recourse to the bishop's popularity as a folk hero among London theatre-goers or as a personal hero of the recusant-hunter Munday. It is to Professor Gabrieli's credit that he cites an instance which does not fit the pattern of support for the attribution to Munday. The weakness of his case for Munday as author lies in his failure to acknowledge the contradictory statistical evidence and account for it. Rather than claiming that Munday was not the author of *Sir Thomas More* or that Shakespeare was the author, I wish to present evidence for the reader to weigh. What is the relative likelihood of Munday over Shakespeare, or Shakespeare over Munday, as author of the play? One can examine the evidence without committing oneself to a particular advocacy. (The recently published *Oxford Shakespeare* favours the view that Munday and Chettle collaborated as authors of the play.) What is the relative likelihood of Munday, rather than Shakespeare, being author of *Titus Andronicus*, or parts of the Huntingdon plays?

In Table One I have selected five stylometric word habits which show a demonstrable difference in their use by Munday and by Shakespeare. The proportion of NO to NO & NOT in the Shakespeare First Folio varies between 36 per cent for *King Lear* and 24 per cent for *Othello*: the average percentage is approximately 31. The proportion in Munday's *John a Kent and John a Cumber* is 37 per cent, higher than in any of the thirty-six First Folio plays. In *Titus*, for example, the proportion is 33 per cent, while in *Julius Caesar* it is 27 per cent, 2 and 4 per cent above and below the mean respectively.

The proportion of BE followed by A to all occurrences of the word BE in *John a Kent* is 0 per cent, while in *Julius Caesar* it is 5. Table One shows the various percentages in brackets. It should be noted that the ratios use the smaller single figure for the numerator, the sum of the double figures for the denominator of each fraction. Quick comparisons can be made with the help of the percentages.

In the centre of Table One I have displayed the counts for *Titus Andronicus*, in order to make five statistical test comparisons with both *John a Kent* on the left and *Julius Caesar* on the right. A rapid glance at the percentages indicates that a greater overall affinity exists between the two Shakespeare plays than between *Titus* and the Munday play. But this impression can be quantified by using the so-called 2X2 contingency table with Fisher's Exact Test.<sup>2</sup> This method yields a direct probability between 0 and 1 for each comparison; the various probabilities are listed under the headings marked 'probability'.

As the five tests on each side of *Titus* are assumed to be statistically independent, the two products can be compared to see which side of the table 'attracts' *Titus* more powerfully than the other. As one would expect, *Titus Andronicus*, containing no Munday material, strongly favours an association with *Julius Caesar*. The likelihood ratio gives a rough idea of the strength of preference.

In Table Two, the test bed, as it were, remains the same, but the candidate for trial is a selection of parts of the Huntingdon plays which are accepted

TABLE 1-COUNTS FOR 3 PLAYS &amp; COMPARISONS

WORD HABIT	JaK	probability	JA	probability	JC
NO	72		93		93
NOT	122(37)	0.3184	172(33)	0.1234	257(27)
BE A	0		5		8
BE not fb A	153 (0)	0.02631	140 (3)	0.5750	142 (5)
I HAVE	9		42		36
HAVE not pb I	74(10)	0.0001058	85(33)	0.1397	112(24)
IN THE	15		41		40
IN not fb THE	148 (9)	0.1039	237(15)	0.3947	186(19)
WITH A	2		16		9
WITH not fb A	115 (2)	0.06764	226 (7)	0.8353	143 (6)
PRODUCT OF PROBABILITIES		6.2E-9		3.3E-3	
LIKELIHOOD RATIO		500 000		to 1	favour of JC

## ABBREVIATIONS

pb = preceded by fb = followed by  
 JaK = JOHN A KENT AND JOHN A CUMBER  
 JA = TITUS ANDRONICUS  
 JC = JULIUS CAESAR  
 NB: 6.2E-9 reads '6.2 times 10 to the -9th power.'  
 Percentages are given in brackets

TABLE 2-COUNTS FOR 3 PLAYS &amp; COMPARISONS

WORD HABIT	JaK	probability	Hunt	probability	JC
NO	72		37		93
NOT	122(37)	0.796	57(39)	0.02115	257(27)
BE A	0		0		8
BE not fb A	153 (0)	1.000	47 (0)	0.2921	142 (5)
I HAVE	9		3		36
HAVE not pb I	74(10)	1.000	32 (9)	0.04112	112(24)
IN THE	15		6		40
IN not fb THE	148 (9)	1.000	62 (9)	0.08791	186(18)
WITH A	2		1		9
WITH not fb A	115 (2)	1.000	55 (2)	0.2938	143 (6)
PRODUCT OF PROBABILITIES		0.796		4.5E-6	
LIKELIHOOD RATIO		200 000		to 1	in favour of JaK

## ABBREVIATIONS

pb = preceded by fb = followed by  
 JaK = JOHN A KENT AND JOHN A CUMBER  
 Hunt = DOWNFALL, lines 782-909; 1725-2079  
 DEATH, lines 1475-1565; 2255-2565  
 JC = JULIUS CAESAR

as written by Munday.<sup>3</sup> The attraction is shifted from the right to the left side of the table, in accordance with expectation.

*Titus* contains all or almost all Shakespearean text and no Munday text. The selected parts of the Huntingdon plays contain all or almost all Munday text, but no Shakespearean text. Table Three ventures a step further. It is believed by many scholars that *Edward III* contains Shakespearean material, Acts I and II at the least. It contains no Munday text. Table Three shows that the five tests deliver a verdict which favours the author of *Julius Caesar*.

Table Four concludes the stylometric argument by presenting the evidence concerning the relative affinities between *Sir Thomas More* and *John a Kent* on the left, and *Sir Thomas More* and *Julius Caesar* on the right. If the presence of Munday text in *More* were greater than that of Shakespearean text, we would expect an attraction to the left side of the table. But the attraction is to the right. It is this kind of conflicting evidence which must be accounted for if Professor Gabrieli's advocacy of Munday's authorship of *Sir Thomas More* is to command the fullest assent.<sup>4</sup>

The sources for the word counts are as follows: *John a Kent* from the Malone Society edition; *Julius Caesar* and *Titus Andronicus* from concordances based on the New Arden editions, produced by the University of Edinburgh; *Sir Thomas More* from the Malone Society edition; *Edward III* from *ALLC Bulletin*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (1982), pp. 5-6. All counts are my own.

There are other reasons for doubting Munday's authorship of *Sir Thomas More*. The manuscript of *More* contains over 50 occurrences of words ending in 'tt' such as 'wett', 'markett', 'frett', 'diett', 'cutt', 'fitt', 'gott', 'riott', 'meritt', 'nett', 'fatt', 'writt', 'hott', 'poett', and 'Witt'. There are no words ending in double 't' in the manuscript of *John a Kent* and *John a Cumber*. The modern word 'been' is spelled 'bin' in all 17 occurrences in *More* while it is spelled 'beene' in all 11 occurrences in *John a Kent*. The upper case 'D' and 'W' are apparently missing from *John a Kent*, while they appear relatively common in *More*.

In conclusion: it is not sufficient to assume Munday's sole authorship of *Sir Thomas More* in light of recent studies of the play.<sup>5</sup>

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1. See *The Book of Sir Thomas More*, ed. W.W. Greg and Harold Jenkins, second edition, The Malone Society Reprints (Oxford, 1961), pp. v-xlv. Also, R.C. Bald, 'The Booke of Sir Thomas More and its Problems', *Shakespeare Survey*, Vol. 2 (1949), pp. 44-61.

2. The method used here is well explained in *Statistical Methods in Biology*, Norman T. J. Bailey, second edition (London, 1981), pp. 52-65.

TABLE 3-COUNTS FOR 3 PLAYS & COMPARISONS

WORD HABIT	JaK	probability	EdIII	probability	JC
NO	72		77		93
NOT	122(37)	1.000	128(38)	0.007588	257(27)
BE A	0		5		8
BE not fb A	153 (0)	0.06082	155 (3)	0.4018	142 (5)
I HAVE	8		21		36
HAVE not pb I	74(10)	0.02505	71(23)	0.8764	112(24)
IN THE	15		48		40
IN not fb THE	148 (9)	0.02372	232(17)	0.9064	186(18)
WITH A	2		15		9
WITH not fb A	115 (2)	0.01951	165 (8)	0.5243	143 (6)
PRODUCT OF PROBABILITIES		7.0E-7		1.3E-3	
LIKELIHOOD RATIO		2 000 to 1 in favour of JC			

ABBREVIATIONS pb = preceded by fb = followed by  
JaK = JOHN A KENT AND JOHN A CUMBER  
EdIII = EDWARD III  
JC = JULIUS CAESAR

TABLE 4-COUNTS FOR 3 PLAYS & COMPARISONS

WORD HABIT	JaK	probability	STM	probability	JC
NO	72		61		93
NOT	122(37)	0.1116	148(29)	0.5573	257(27)
BE A	0		6		8
BE not fb A	153 (0)	0.03095	163 (4)	0.5858	142 (5)
I HAVE	8		38		36
HAVE not pb I	74(10)	0.0001418	78(33)	0.1672	112(24)
IN THE	15		35		40
IN not fb THE	148 (9)	0.1262	208(14)	0.3779	186(18)
WITH A	2		17		9
WITH not fb A	115 (2)	0.002969	135(11)	0.1500	143 (6)
PRODUCT OF PROBABILITIES		1.8E-10		3.1E-3	
LIKELIHOOD RATIO		16 000 000 to 1 in favour of JC			

ABBREVIATIONS pb = preceded by fb = followed by  
JaK = JOHN A KENT AND JOHN A CUMBER  
STM = original text of SIR THOMAS MORE  
JC = JULIUS CAESAR  
NB: E-10 reads '1.8 times 10 to the -10th power.'  
Percentages are given in brackets.

3. Both Huntingdon plays have been accepted as mainly by Munday. For a detailed stylometric analysis of their authorship see 'The Consonance of Literary Elements with Mathematical Models: a Study of Authorship in the Huntingdon Plays', T. Merriam, unpublished master's dissertation, University of London, 1985, Chapter VII, pp. 170-237.

4. The challenge could be distilled in this way: can there be found five or more other stylometric word habits which differentiate Munday from Shakespeare, which confirm the correct verdicts in Tables One, Two and Three, and which reverse the result in Table Four, using the same method of statistical comparison? If so, can they overwhelm the 'misleading' evidence which I have presented? Or: can it be shown that the counts which I have presented are falsified to such an extent that they give an incorrect result? Or: are the statistical calculations mathematically incorrect? Or: can the method and theory of stylometry be logically falsified?

5. I refer, of course, to the original text only, in Hand S. See *The Elizabethan Theatre & 'The Book of Sir Thomas More'* by Scott McMillin (Ithaca, 1987).

