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THE MORE-NORFOLK CONNECTION

Though art imitates life, it also distorts it. For example, the popularity of Robert Bolt's play *A Man For All Seasons* has temporarily obscured the true nature of Thomas More's friendship with Thomas Howard, the third Duke of Norfolk (d. 1554). Bolt represents Norfolk as a rude, but good-hearted sportsman who quite simply loved More and wanted his friend, by submitting to Henry VIII's supremacy, to save himself. But More valued his Saviour more than his sovereign and Norfolk found himself berating More for sacrificing their friendship to a principle which he was incapable of understanding.[1] Thus, the poignant contrast between More the man for all seasons, and Norfolk, the man for any season.

Bolt introduces More and Norfolk by way of a physical contrast. On the one hand, More is : "Pale, middle-sized, not robust. But the life of the mind in him is so abundant and debonair that it illuminates the body. His movements are open and swift but never wild, having a natural moderation. The face is intellectual and quickly delighted, the norm to which it returns serious and compassionate. Only in moments of high crisis does it become ascetic -- though then freezingly." In contrast, Norfolk is : "Heavy, active, a sportsman and soldier held together by rigid adherence to the minimal code of conventional duty. Attractively aware of his moral and intellectual insignificance, but also a great nobleman, untouchably convinced that his acts and ideas are important because they are his."[2]

The outer surface reflects the inner. More, the intellectual, supported by a wispy body suffuses all his relationships by the quality of his thought. He has complete control save in the matter of faith where the basic Greek ideal of moderation is overwhelmed by the Christian ideal of martyrdom. There is a soul bound within his wretched rib cage burning to burst out and join the heavenly company of saints. Contrariwise, Norfolk, the athlete, curiously sports a heavy body. His activity apparently has not

1. Robert Bolt, *A Man For All Seasons* (New York : Vintage Books, 1962) pp. 6-9, 25-27, 51-54, 57-60, 69-72, 74-79, 86-93.
2. Bolt, "People in the Play".

been sufficient to keep him trim. Perhaps, like other aging athletes he no longer dictates to appetite and thus finds himself a willing victim of nature. To Bolt, Norfolk's physiognomy betrays his moral stance, that of a man without moral stature. Norfolk is congenial nonetheless, for he's a fellow who recognizes his own limitations in such fashion that one cannot help liking him.

Bolt depicts More and Norfolk as men in their forties, though More in 1532, the year of his resignation as Chancellor, was fifty-four or fifty-five while Norfolk was in his sixtieth year. In contrast to Bolt's characterization, Erasmus tells us that More's complexion was clear and bright, not pale. Perhaps pink describes it better since More was blue-eyed and auburn-haired with a cheerful face. Erasmus viewed More as indifferent to both food and dress. More ate coarse bread, beef, salt-fish, fruit, and eggs and cared not what he wore.[1] Certainly More's casual dress came by design as did his nourishing but unexciting diet which conferred a healthy rosé to his cheeks. Like the prophet Daniel who followed a regimen of pulse and water, this diet may have enabled More to withstand the discomfort of the hair shirt "which tamed his flesh till the blood" ran. (p. 109) Though More later suffered from a "sickly disposition of his breast", it may have been the result as he said of too much time spent at his desk writing. (pp. 283, 287) Or it could have been the conclusion to his self-denial. How much longer More might have lived had he not been executed is difficult to tell. In any case, his father died in his 80th year. (pp. 52, 56) More's nearly forty years of activity as lawyer, royal servant and savant, however, indicate a robust constitution and potential for longevity.

Historical fact is ignored once more in Bolt's portrait of Norfolk which shows an aging athlete on the heavy side. In actual fact, according to Falieri, the Venetian ambassador, Norfolk was short, slim, and swarthy. He was wiry rather than obese. He wore no beard as in the 15th century fashion. His acquiline nose was topped by dark, luminous eyes.[2]

The physical contrast between the two men -- Norfolk, athletic, vigorous, secular, and More -- intellectual, ascetic, his body an avenue to salvation -- perhaps is a reflection of their divergent cosmologies. In time those cosmologies would separate the two from a friendship that, superficially, is an enigma. Actually the connection between the Howards

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1. R.W. Chambers, *Thomas More* (Ann-Arbor : Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1958 [orig. pub. 1935]), p. 176. All the references in the paragraph are to this book.
2. Gerald Brenan and Edward Phillips Statham, *The House of Howard*, 2 vols. (London : Hutchinson & Co., 1907), I, 118 ; *C.S.P. Ven*, IV, 694.

and More goes back at least to 1510 when More as Under-Sheriff reported to Norfolk's father, also named Thomas Howard, then Earl of Surrey (d. 1524), who was Treasurer.[1] Norfolk, of course, succeeded his father as Treasurer on December 2, 1522.[2] Before this association there may have been legal and commercial contacts since the Howards also had many relatives engaged in the law and in commerce, as well as other activities, in London.[3] When Norfolk attended court, he resided at his London house within easy access of More's Chelsea manse, the Great House. From May 1521, the date of his appointment as Under-Treasurer -- an office he held until September 1525 -- More worked closely with Norfolk, the Treasurer, and after 1525 the two men continued to sit together in Council. Norfolk who was familiar with everyone and also a great favorite of Henry VIII in the late 1520's and early 1530's[4] would be an important man for More

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1. Prof. A.F. Pollard first noticed the relationship between Thomas Howard, second Duke of Norfolk (d. 1524) and Thomas More undersheriff of London in "The Making of Sir Thomas More's Richard III" in *Historical Essays in Honour of James Tait*, ed. by J.G. Edwards, V.H. Galbraith and E.F. Jacob (Manchester, 1933), pp. 224-28. Pollard speculates that More as under-sheriff would have had frequent contact with the Treasurer and that Norfolk, not Morton, may have been More's informant and thus responsible for the information contained in his *History of King Richard the Third*. Building on this evidence, S.T. Bindoff elaborates the nature of the relationship in a now famous lecture, *Report From the Folger Library*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (May 1954), 7-8. Though I have not been privileged to hear Prof. Bindoff's most entertaining detective story, he has graciously advised me about the More-Howard connection. I have noted elsewhere my deep obligation to him for guidance, help, and encouragement during my stay in England. For the most recent discussions of this subsidiary issue see D.E. Rhodes, *John Argentine, Provost of King's, His Life and Library* (Amsterdam, 1967) and C.A.J. Armstrong, trans. *The Usurpation of Richard The Third : Dominicus Mancinus Ad Angelum Catonem. De Occupatione Regni Anglie Per Riccardum Tercium Libellus*, 2nd ed. (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1969).
2. Melvin J. Tucker, *The Life of Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey and Second Duke of Norfolk 1443-1524* (The Hague : Mouton & Co., 1964), p. 139. Hereafter cited as Tucker.
3. I hope to deal with these matters in the future. Glimmerings of Howard's commercial activities may be found in the Howard Household book already cited. The Howard propensity to marry lawyers in the late 15th century is suggested in the network of ladies and spouses who paid court to the first Howard Countess of Surrey. See M.J. Tucker, "The Ladies in Skelton's *Garland of Laurel*", *Renaissance Quarterly*, XXII (Winter, 1969), 333-345.
4. See Lacey Baldwin Smith, *A Tudor Tragedy : The Life and Times of Catherine Howard* (New York : Pantheon Books, 1961), pp. 27-35. For More as Under-Treasurer, see G.R. Elton, *The Tudor Revolution in Government*, Cambridge : Cambridge Univ. Press, 1969 (orig. pub. 1953), pp. 22-25, 108, 120.

to cultivate on his way to the Chancellorship.[1] Norfolk, who himself did not have the capacity for the position, soon publicly hailed More's appointment.[2] Except for Norfolk's absences to quell such risings as that in Suffolk over the Amicable Grant (1525) or his military expeditions to Ireland (1520-22) and Scotland (1523), the two men saw each other on a daily basis. Political proximity and social intercourse apparently alleviated the need for correspondence and probably account for the lack of letters.

Despite More's acknowledged intellectual superiority and his authority as Chancellor, Norfolk did not hesitate to castigate him when he found him one day in a surplice singing in the choir at Chelsea Church. Norfolk's wondering comment said it all : "God body ! God body ! My Lord Chancellor, a parish Clerk, a parish Clerk ! You dishonour the King and his office."[3] More thought otherwise, for did not Henry VIII sometimes go to as many as five masses a day ? Had not their sovereign written two masses and often delighted in theological disputation ?[4] Perhaps Norfolk's elevated opinion of himself and of the office which he never obtained colored his thinking. Implicit seems the inference that for Norfolk politics, office, and place outweighed church. Bolt utilizes the incident to underscore More's dedication to God's service rather than Henry VIII's and to emphasize the different scale of values which More and Norfolk held.[5]

The More-Norfolk association indeed presents an almost insoluble enigma for the dramatist. How can More in Bolt's play be fond of an over-exercised, under-educated nobleman (as Bolt depicts him) ? Such affection defies human understanding and Bolt presents the relationship in that fashion. Friendship, like marriage, sometimes has no common ground but affirmations of affection and promises to keep. More's proximity to Norfolk in Henry's Privy Council, where they sat as Chancellor and Treasurer respectively, two thirds of the important conciliar steering committee of Chancellor-Treasurer-Privy Seal, may have been all that was necessary. Governance brought them together, politics

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1. Prof. G.R. Elton points out in his paper delivered at the St. Thomas More Symposium (October 1970) that More made a great deal of money via royal grants prior to his appointment as Chancellor. May one infer that his ability to make being a courtier pay issued from a talent for getting along with the right people ?
2. Chambers, pp. 238-40.
3. Roper's *Life of More,* in *Lives of Saint Thomas More,* ed. by E.E. Reynolds (London : Dent, 1963), p. 26.
4. Ibid. For Henry VIII's intellectual activities see M.J. Tucker, "Life at Henry VII's Court", *History Today* (May, 1969), 325-331.
5. Bolt, p. 26.

separated them. The one redeeming feature in Bolt's representation is its fidelity to the tradition that More had a great capacity to inspire affection, devotion, and regard. More had the contemporary reputation for being the most sought after companion in the realm. Henry VIII was seen to pop in unannounced at More's Chelsea residence. They would take the air, arm-in-arm, talking familiarly, in More's garden.[1] Indeed, Erasmus once remarked that More perfected friendship to its highest art, for he not only forgave faults, but also cheered the disconsolate, advised on business-personal affairs, patronized the indigent and mediated quarrels.[2]

Another discordant note in Bolt's characterization of Norfolk, however, is his distaste for learning. In his view Norfolk is the prototype of the perennial English nobleman always off shooting somewhere -- only in the 16th century it is not shooting, but hawking. In fact, one meets Norfolk for the first time in the play as he comes from an afternoon's hawking. Immediately Bolt has Norfolk reveal his inner self by recording his attitude to Aristotle whom Richard Rich has irrelevantly cited.

> "Norfolk (To Rich) I've never found much use in Aristotle myself, not practically. Great philosopher, of course. Wonderful mind."[3]

Bolt has Norfolk instantly demonstrate that he is unfamiliar with the world of intellect. Intellect is not included in his value-system. Aristotle is beyond his ken. To insinuate that Norfolk is a "beautiful" person but a functional illiterate caricatures the historical Norfolk and injures More as well, by making it appear that he indiscriminately selects his friends. Bolt allows Norfolk but two conversations to his name : sports and politics. How then, does Norfolk maintain his position in the intellectual circles which include such humanistic lights as Colet and Erasmus ? Again, in Bolt's view there is no explanation except affection, proximity, and politics.

To suggest that Norfolk is an intellectual cipher is, of course, absurd. Norfolk's grandfather, John Howard, was a great patron of the arts. Music and drama both held sway at Howard's house at Stoke Nayland, Suffolk.[4] Norfolk's father patronized the monk Alexander Barclay who dedicated two works to him : a translation of Sallust's *Bellum Jugurthinum*

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1. Chambers, p. 29.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
3. Bolt, p. 8.
4. John Payne Collier, *Household Books of John [Howard] Duke of Norfolk, And Thomas of Surrey ; Temp. 1481-1490...*, Roxburghe Club (London : William Nicol Shakespeare Press, 1844), pp. xxii-xxv.

and an introduction to the writing and translation of French. Moreover, his father and his brother Edward, the Lord Admiral, figure prominently in Barclay's *Eclogues*.[1] John Skelton poetically immortalized Norfolk's mother, the Countess of Surrey, in his *Garland of Laurel*.[2] Norfolk's half-brother, John Bourchier Lord Berners, englished Froissart in a memorable translation.[3]

Norfolk's deep and abiding interest in the arts is shown by his selection of John Clerke as his secretary and perhaps tutor to his son the celebrated poet, Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey. Clerke instructed the little Earl in his appreciation of Petrarch, Serafino, and Sannazaro.[4] Moreover, Henry VIII, who had an avid interest in intellectual matters,[5] entrusted the education of his own natural son Henry Fitzroy, the Duke of Richmond and Somerset, to Norfolk. Norfolk's son Surrey became Fitzroy's constant companion ; both were sent to live at the royal castle of Windsor. Norfolk's daughter Mary married Fitzroy. Henry VIII commissioned Norfolk on Fitzroy's premature death to bury him secretly at Thetford in the Howard sanctuary.[6]

Superficially, at least, credence to Bolt's characterization of Norfolk as an anti-intellectual pragmatist seems given by Norfolk's vexatious remark that : "I never read the Scripture, ... nor never will read it : it was merry in England afore the new learning came up ; yea, I would all things were as hath been in times past."[7] The key word here, however, is "new" which Norfolk associated not with humanism but with the tainted doctrines of the new Protestants who took Scripture as their sole guide to conduct. As a matter of fact, the origin of Norfolk's famous remark comes from a confrontation with a supporter of the recently fallen Thomas Cromwell

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1. Tucker, pp. 124-25, 142.
2. See Owen Gingerich and Melvin J. Tucker, "The Astronomical Dating of Skelton's *Garland of Laurel*". *Huntington Library Quarterly*, XXII (May, 1969), 207-220.
3. Tucker, p. 74.
4. Edwin Casady, *Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey* (New York : The Modern Language Association of America, 1938), p. 27. Sergio Baldi in his essay "The Secretary of the Duke of Norfolk and the First Italian Grammar in England" in Siefried Korner, ed. *Studies In English Language And Literature Presented to Professor Dr. Karl Brunner on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (Stuttgart, 1967), 1-16, suggests that there were three John Clerkes and doubts Casady's assertion that Clerke became Norfolk's secretary on Norfolk's assumption of his dukedom or that his abilities were as high as Casady claimed.
5. See "Life at Henry VII's Court", *History Today* (May, 1969), 325-31.
6. Casady, pp. 32-34, 48-49, 56-57.
7. James Anthony Froude, *History Of England From The Fall Of Wolsey To The Death Of Elizabeth*, 12 vols. (New York : Charles Scribner and Co., 1866), IV, 107.

(1540). The man, who was also employed in Norfolk's domain, the Exchequer, had married a nun. When Norfolk upbraided him for his sacrilege against God's law, he replied that he had good Scriptural license, to which Norfolk delivered his telling rejoinder.[1] Norfolk did not say that he had never read, merely that he had not read Scripture. His antipathy to Scripture calls to mind the placing of English *Bibles* in every parish Church in 1538, a measure favored by Cromwell and Cranmer. Norfolk probably considered it a further assault on his faith. Though he shared in the monastic spoils, it did not temperamentally or aesthetically suit him and he tried to stem the anti-Catholic tide. For example, he introduced Henry VIII's doctrinally conservative Six Articles into Parliament in 1539. Again, he may have had something to do with Bishop Gardiner's attempt to return the Church of England to Rome in 1541. Certainly his enemies thought so.

Clearly by 1540 Norfolk identified himself with the more conservative faction in court led by Gardiner, his son's former tutor,[2] who was lukewarm to Cromwell's economic vivisection of the Church and to Cranmer's penchant for doctrinal innovation. Norfolk appears then to be more sympathetic to More's point of view than to that of the radical reformers.

If one views Norfolk as an educated man, albeit with none of More's intellectual cast and caliber, the seeming incongruity of their friendship is dissipated. Nonetheless, the two men had distinctively different life styles. One can never imagine More installing a mistress in his menage as did Norfolk. Norfolk, tiring of his wife Elizabeth née Stafford, daughter to the ill fated Duke of Buckingham, brought Bess Holland, his steward's daughter, into his household and openly consorted with her. The Duchess indignantly protested in letter after letter to Thomas Cromwell. Though not all of her complaints can be taken at face value, one may infer that Norfolk did not know how to secure domestic tranquility. That his son and daughter sided with him[3] does not alter the case. Norfolk knew how to inspire hate. In fact, he himself proudly related that Wolsey, Cromwell and Buckingham each accounted him their chief enemy.[4] This in marked contrast to More's capacity for friendship.

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1. *Ibid.*, pp. 106-107.
2. A.G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (London : B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1964), pp. 124, 154, 159, 172 ; J.J. Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII* (Berkeley, Calif., Univ. of California Press, 1968), pp. 483-84.
3. L.P., XI, 502.
4. Scarisbrick, p. 484.

More infused his familial relations with a gentleness and good humor that all admired. He was the epitome of the good father. He educated his daughters as well as his son. In chastizing them, he chose not the rod, but a peacock feather.[1] The way of peace was More's royal highway just as the way of the warrior was Norfolk's. Birth dictated life styles as well as temperament -- More was born into the lawyers class, Norfolk, into the aristocracy-military caste. One created with foolscap, the other destroyed with steel.

The rending of the More-Norfolk friendship cannot be ascribed to a picked quarrel in which More questions Norfolk's ancestry.[2] The break began during More's tenure as Chancellor. While More carefully avoided entanglement that would mean choosing service to God above service to the crown, Norfolk became an active instrument in Henry VIII's attempt to assert independence from Rome. For example, in 1531, Norfolk invited many notables, both foreign and English, to his London house, to declare that the Pope's jurisdiction extended not to matrimonial cases because such jurisdiction was temporal and not spiritual.[3] Even after More's resignation as Chancellor, Norfolk tried to help his friend. He made possible the continued pursuit of the suspected heretic John Field, when he was prevailed upon by the bishops of Winchester and London at More's request to return Field to prison though he had been freed by More's successor.[4]

Norfolk's famous meeting with More, however, concerns his attempt to prevail upon More to accept Henry VIII's ecclesiastical supremacy :

> "By the mass, Master More, it is perilous striving with princes. And therefore I would wish you somewhat to incline to the King's pleasure, for, by God's body, Master More, *Indignatio principis mors est.*'
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> 'Is that all, my Lord ? ' quoth he. 'Then in good faith is there no more difference between your Grace and me, but that I shall die today and you tomorrow.' "[5]

Such affection for a friend and compassion for a fellow Catholic does Norfolk credit. For whatever reasons, and one will never know them precisely, Norfolk did not want More to die. Regard for what More had

1. Chambers, pp. 179-81.
2. Bolt, pp. 71-72.
3. Scarisbrick, p. 293 ; L.P., V, 805.
4. G.R. Elton, "Sir Thomas More and the Opposition to Henry VIII", *B.I.H.R.*, XLI (1968), 23.
5. Roper, ed. cit., p. 35.

been, done, and still could do -- these emotions may have been mixed, but they were no less sincere.

A few years earlier, Norfolk had arrested Wolsey and demanded his Great Seal of office. A few years later, he arrested Cromwell.[1] These falls must have given pleasure. Norfolk dared not record his feelings at More's imprisonment and death. Of course, there may have been a perverse sort of relief for Norfolk such as that which one derives from seeing another pay the penalty for failing to conform to the secular world. Confirmation of one's *Weltanschauung,* even in the suffering of a friend, eases one's conscience. Norfolk knew himself, he took the oath almost blithely. He responded to the dictates of the flesh, More to the spirit.

More's prophetic words nearly came true. The Earl of Surrey was executed for high treason on January 19, 1547. Norfolk, implicated in the treason of his son, almost followed him to the scaffold. Only Henry VIII's death in the night of January 28th prevented the execution of the death sentence against him. He remained in the Tower during the entire reign of Edward VI (1547-1553). Books and his beloved secretary, John Clerke, however, joined him and lessened the rigors of imprisonment. On the accession of Mary he returned to court as Earl Marshal and Treasurer, and had no difficulty accepting the reestablished Catholic faith for which More had died.

During Norfolk's imprisonment his daughter had appointed John Foxe, the Protestant martyrologist, as tutor to his grandson and heir, Thomas Howard, Surrey's son (d. 1572). Characteristically, on his release, Norfolk, in his chameleon-like fashion, dismissed Foxe as his first act.[2] Foxe was anathema to Norfolk and his dismissal suggests that there may have been a stronger spiritual compatibility to the Norfolk-More friendship than the playwright indicates.

Norfolk served his faith, too, in his own way, but it is doubtful, if their positions were reversed, that he, who was one of More's condemning judges, could have blessed the judges and expressed the happy thought that one day they might "merrily all meet together, to our everlasting salvation."[3]

1. Chambers, pp. 297-98 ; Scarisbrick, pp. 235, 375.
2. Neville Williams, *Thomas Howard, Fourth Duke of Norfolk* (London : Barrie and Rockliff, 1969), pp. 27-29.
3. Chambers, p. 342.

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