THE SIX SO-CALLED SIGNATURES OF WILLIAM SHAKSPERE OF STRATFORD AND 'HAND D' IN THE MANUSCRIPT OF THE SHAKESPEARE PLAY *SIR THOMAS MORE* WRITTEN BY FRANCIS BACON

SYNOPSIS

There are so many striking similarities between the lives and careers of Sir Francis Bacon and Sir Thomas More. Their fathers Sir Nicholas Bacon, Attorney to the Court of Wards and Liveries, Lord Keeper and *de facto* Lord Chancellor of England, and Sir John More, Serjeant-at-law, Judge of the Common Pleas and Judge of the King's Bench were senior legal figures in their respective Tudor administrations. Sir Thomas More and Sir Francis Bacon also had very similar educational and legal backgrounds. More was educated at Canterbury College, Oxford, New Inn, and Lincoln's Inn, and eventually rose to the position of Lord Chancellor the highest legal office in the kingdom. Bacon was educated at Cambridge and Gray's Inn and later served as Solicitor-General, Attorney-General, Lord Keeper and Lord Chancellor of England. More and Bacon were the most famous leading political figures of their generation who respectively served under the Tudor king Henry VIII and Elizabeth I and the Stuart monarch James 1. They are also regarded as the greatest English intellectual and literary figures of the Renaissance. Both developed a love of poetry and drama from an earlier age and mixed in the same circles as the leading poets, dramatists, and literary figures of their day. The two were also the most distinguished English prose writers of their era, each wrote a biography of an English monarch Richard III and Henry VII and both wrote famous classic utopias: *A Fruitful Pleasant Work of the Best State of a Public Weal and of the Isle Called Utopia* and *New Atlantis* (*or*, *Land of the Rosicrucians*), in which, of course, the latter referred to former.

It is thus hardly surprising that Bacon took a very close interest and was very familiar with the life and writings of his distinguished predecessor whose lives correspondingly paralleled each other and wrote the very controversial play *Sir Thomas More* about a Catholic martyr under Henry VIII, which was still a very sensitive and potentially dangerous subject, under the Protestant regime of his daughter Elizabeth I. What is less surprising, is that in the enormous body of literature constituting the canon of the play *Sir Thomas More* in which around a dozen candidates have been put forward as authors/scribes/copyists, some of whom were unlikely, others ridiculous, and one or two verging on the impossible, not one single orthodox editor or scholar has ever suggested Bacon was somehow involved in its composition. Furthermore, in the Arden edition of *Sir Thomas More* by John Jowett, Professor of Shakespeare Studies and Deputy-Director of the Shakespeare Institute, which will mis-inform the ordinary schoolmen, the casual student, and the rest of the world about its true authorship for years and decades to come, the name of Bacon (not, of course, in relation to its authorship) appears only once on its Index.

The reason for this deliberate and systematic suppression is inextricably bound up in the illusion that the illiterate/semi-illiterate William Shakspere of Stratford wrote the Shakespeare works, the greatest literary fraud in the history of the world.

For over a century a phalanx of orthodox Shakespeare scholars has misleadingly, falsely and fraudulently stated, to reinforce the belief systems of their indoctrinated readers, that there are six surviving signatures of undisputed authenticity which have come down to us in the hand of William Shakespeare, i.e., William Shakspere of Stratford. These knowingly untruthful and deceitful statements serve as an indispensable bulwark against the so-called anti-Stratfordians who insist William Shakspere of Stratford was not the author of the Shakespeare plays and was illiterate or semi-illiterate. It is often said it is never wise to underestimate the stupidity of humankind but surely in the fullness of time it will be eventually realised that nothing could

ever compete with the absurdity of the greatest literary fraud of all time that William Shakspere wrote the Shakespeare plays. If only on the basis that his own parents John and Mary Shakspere were illiterate as were his three children Susanna, Judith and Hamnet. So, the literacy/literary prowess of the Shakspere family runs: illiterate, illiterate, the world's greatest writer, illiterate, illiterate and illiterate. Lord, such fools these mortals be!

The desperate need of the Stratfordian authorities supported by their orthodox Shakespeare commissars to state and insist that some, or all, of these so-called signatures are written in the hand of William Shakspere is from their perspective an absolute imperative. Because if the man from Stratford was not able to write or sign his own name it would confirm he was illiterate and not the author of the Shakespeare works. These six disputed signatures are obviously the last line of defence and the last stand of the fraudulent Stratfordians.

The six so-called Shakspere signatures are found on legal documents. Two of these relate to the purchase of the Blackfriars property which was owned by members of the Bacon family and three on his last will and testament which was overseen by Bacon's relative Thomas Russell for which there is evidence that it is fraudulent or a forgery, signed by lawyers or clerks on behalf of the illiterate William Shakspere of Stratford. With the other signature found on a deposition in the Belott versus Mountjoy case where in all these documents William Shakspere of Stratford was never once identified as the great poet and dramatist William Shakespeare.

To shore up this fraud the Stratfordian authorities aided by orthodox Shakespeare scholars have tried to link these six so-called Shakspere signatures to the handwriting of Hand D in the manuscript of *Sir Thomas More* that bear no relation to one another whatsoever and are clearly not from the same hand. On this particular question, that is absolutely critical to the custodians of the Stratfordian fraudulent illusion no expert opinion is required, all that is needed is for the reader to take a look at the facsimiles of the signatures and the Hand D passages in *Sir Thomas More* to realise this is the complete emperor's clothes of Stratfraudian scholarship.

More than four hundred years after it was written the hidden truth about the provenance and authorship of the Shakespeare play entitled *Sir Thomas More* and 'Hand D' is finally revealed and confirmed here for the first time.

The manuscript of the play *Sir Thomas More* consists of twenty folio leaves and as presented by its various editors and commentators it divides into two parts. According to the predominant scenario that has become a consolidated orthodoxy, thirteen leaves of it constitute the original play or text. This is augmented by what are known as the Additions written in several hands on seven leaves inserted in three different places together with two slips pasted into the leaves of the so-called Original Text at points where it borders the revisions. The Original Text is written throughout in a single hand (with comments from Sir Edmund Tilney, Master of the Revels) with the Additions written in five other hands designated as A, B, C, D and E.

Despite the fact, that several candidates have been put forward as the author (or scribe) of the Original Text and a dozen candidates advanced as authors/scribes/copyists for the Additions it is on this shifting, misleading and changing quicksand that a consolidated orthodoxy has been established. In which the so-called Hand S (initially believed to be the hand of a scribe now stated to be that of Anthony Munday the alleged author of the Original Text) and hands A to E in *Sir Thomas More* are designated as follows:

Hand S	Anthony Munday
Hand A	Henry Chettle
Hand B	Thomas Heywood
Hand C	unidentified scribe
Hand D	identified by some orthodox scholars as William Shakspere

This is reflected in the titles of the two recent full-length editions *Sir Thomas More*: *A Play by Anthony Munday and Others Revised by Henry Chettle*, *Thomas Dekker*, *Thomas Heywood and William Shakespeare* (Manchester University Press, 1990) and *Sir Thomas More Original Text by Anthony Munday and Henry Chettle Censored by Tilney Revisions co-ordinated by Hand C revised by Henry Chettle*, *Thomas Dekker*, *Thomas Heywood and William Shakespeare* (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2011/2022). Even though their respective editors, professors Vittorio Gabrieli and Giorgio Melchiori and John Jowett, Professor of Shakespeare Studies and Deputy-Director of the Shakespeare Institute are of course acutely aware that the authorship of *Sir Thomas More* is uncertain and disputed, and it may be added, its attribution to Munday (and Chettle) wrong. Yet, in full knowledge of the fact that its authorship is disputed and unproven, its editors still gave their editions misleading and false titles. A practice which falls well below accepted academic standards, exposing a lack of objectivity and impartiality, which absolutely erodes and undermines any trust the reader might have uncritically assumed in their probity and integrity regarding its authorship.

By accident or design, orthodox editors and commentators have created an elaborate charade of multi-authorship founded upon hypothesis after hypothesis further compounded by endless surmise, speculation and conjecture. This has served to conceal the true sole authorship of the play by Francis Bacon, that forms part of the Stratfordian fraud that the illiterate/semi-illiterate William Shakspere of Stratford wrote the Shakespeare poems and plays, the greatest literary works in the history of the world.

The anti-Catholic writings and activities of Anthony Munday run thoroughly contrary to his alleged authorship of *Sir Thomas More* whose eponymous character was a Catholic martyr, portrayed by its true author as a humane, fair-minded & heroic individual. This insurmountable obstacle has been repeatedly pointed out by authors of various colours and persuasions that no number of special pleadings or contrived arguments will bring into correspondence with one another. It is self-evident that the true author of *Sir Thomas More* had a profound empathy and admiration for him, which is reflected in the portrayal of his character throughout the play.

In the play Thomas More (a partly disguised dramatic portrait of Bacon himself) entreats the people to imagine how they would feel if they were banished to a foreign country and found themselves and their children in danger and peril of their lives in just the same way they were cruelly persecuting the foreigners or strangers, themes which still greatly resonate around the globe to the present day.

In the first part of *New Atlantis* (*or*, *Land of the Rosicrucians*) Bacon provides a full picture of how strangers should be received and treated in a foreign land that completes the vision implied by Bacon in *Sir Thomas More*. It foretells of a society built on brotherly love for the betterment of humankind in perpetuity. It reveals Bacon's dream of a commonwealth of nations as part of a *Universal Reformation of the Whole World* the title of the volume containing (the coeval of *New Atlantis*) the first Rosicrucian manifesto the *Fama Fraternitatis*, that announced to England and the rest of Europe the existence of the Rosicrucian Brotherhood.

It should have been immediately obvious to the editors of the complex manuscript of *Sir Thomas More* with its six hands/scribes/copyists that it originated from a literary workshop but for reasons best known to themselves neither its early editors, or those editors of its modern editions, professors Gabrieli and Melchiori and John Jowett, Professor of Shakespeare Studies and Deputy-Director of the Shakespeare Institute, mention or discuss it.

It is well documented that at the time of the writing, revision and production of the *Sir Thomas More* manuscript there existed a literary workshop in London organized, directed and overseen by Francis and Anthony Bacon with connections to English printers and publishers employing scribes and copyists for the producing and distribution of manuscripts of plays, masques and other dramatic entertainments.

It is also well documented that poets, dramatists, writers, scribes and copyists were in the service of Francis and Anthony Bacon. We know for certain that the poet and dramatist Ben Jonson and the poet George Herbert assisted Bacon in the translations of his *Essays* and *De Augmentis Scientiarum*. It is also certain the poet John Boroughs and the historian John Selden also came to Bacon's aid in his research and literary endeavours. We learn from Bacon's little known Private Memoranda or notebook that to assist him in these vast designs for humankind, as well as poets and dramatists, he sought out writers, historians and scientists from the leading academic institutions for securing the brightest minds necessary for the undertaking of the vast Rosicrucian-Freemasonic enterprises he had long contemplated for humanity. The scribes and copyists acting under Bacon's direction in the production of *Sir Thomas More* were at one time or another part of his literary workshop all of them sworn to secrecy while in the process of working up and producing manuscripts usually earmarked for distribution and publication.

It was this literary scriptorium that produced Bacon's own collection of manuscripts known as the Northumberland Manuscript that contains 17 writings comprising letters, essays, religio-political treatises, dramatic devices and plays, etc. In addition to originally having held copies of his Shakespeare plays *Richard II* and *Richard III*, its cover contains references and links to his narrative Shakespeare poem *The Rape of Lucrece*, and another three of his Shakespeare plays *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Romeo and Juliet* & *The Merchant of Venice*. This is moreover the only manuscript where the names Bacon and Shakespeare appear together in a contemporary document. Various forms of his name Bacon/Francis Bacon and his pseudonym Shakespeare/ William Shakespeare have been scribbled across its outer cover on around twenty occasions. Above the entry for his Shakespeare play *Richard II* appears the entry '*By Mr. ffrauncis William Shakespeare*', and further down the page the word '*Your*' is twice written across his pseudonym William Shakespeare-so it reads '*Your William Shakespeare*'. The outer cover is in two or likely three different hands, one of them Bacon's, with its various manuscripts, also written in two or three different hands, which is especially noticeable in *Leicester's Commonwealth*, a similar number of hands to those involved in producing the manuscript of *Sir Thomas More*.

In 1924 there appeared a rare and little-known work, notice of which does not appear in the recent modern edition by professors Gabrieli and Melchiori (Manchester University Press, 1990) or in the Arden edition of *Sir Thomas More* (2011, 2022) by John Jowett, Professor of Shakespeare Studies and Deputy-Director of the Shakespeare Institute. This important work by Edwin J. Des Moineaux *Manuscript Said to be Handwriting of William Shakespeare Identified as Penmanship of Another Person: Mystery of* "*Sir Thomas More*" *document Unravelled: An Entirely New Phase of the Bacon-Shakespeare Controversy* produces side-by-side handwriting samples of Bacon's known and well-documented hand and that of Hand D in *Sir Thomas More*:

> We believe that the identity of the writer of the script reproduced and described above is so apparent that further dissection and lengthy comment would be superfluous. A more detailed and elaborate analysis could be made, and more specimens of penmanship shown, but the writer is confident that the exhibits herein contained are sufficient for the purpose of this monograph.

The complex manuscript of *Sir Thomas More* written by Bacon was produced in his literary workshop in a process that saw him direct its various scribes and copyists as it evolved over a period of many years which accounts to some extent for its complicated state. The so-called Original Text comprising thirteen leaves is a fair copy or transcription of his manuscript ('foul papers') or a copy of the complete play as he initially conceived it. The Additions some directly dictated by Bacon to his various scribes and the copyists working from earlier drafts required later revisions and amendments and other forms of authorial and editorial intervention. Some aspects of the seemingly impenetrable and intractable problems the manuscript gives rise to, may never be fully or satisfactorily resolved. Most importantly, however, more than four

hundred years after its original composition the overwhelming and irrefutable evidence much of it produced here for the first time confirms beyond any doubt that the Shakespeare play *Sir Thomas More* was written by Francis Bacon our secret Shakespeare.