The Shakespearean status of the Danielle poems: some lexical notes

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Over the years I have carried out a stylistic analysis of texts, in a forensic linguistic context, I suppose about twenty times. Never have I been called into court. The reason is simple: the evidence is usually ambiguous. A text (such as a statement) is usually too short to draw any reliable conclusions, or the evidence is partial and conflicting. There have been some successful cases based on linguistic evidence, but my impression is that for every case that reaches a firm conclusion, ten do not.

The results with literary stylometrics can be better, because the texts are longer, and also the authors are doing special things to the language, so that stylistic fingerprints stand out more clearly. But when the text is short, as with the Danielle poems (831 words), and the subject-matter motivates the use of a cliched and conservative language, the likelihood of seeing a distinctive style becomes remote.

There are certain minimal considerations that need to be satisfied. At the time of writing these poems, thought to be 1593/4, whoever the author was would have reached a certain level of vocabulary growth. If it was Shakespeare (S), we would expect to see usage that was within his lexical range by that time. That is, the relevant point of comparison is with the following texts: *Two Gentlemen of Verona, The Taming of the Shrew, Henry VI Parts 1-3, Titus Andronicus, Richard III, The Comedy of Errors, Venus and Adonis, The Rape of Lucrece* – and probably *King Edward III* and (at least some of) the Sonnets. A comparison with anything later than these (i.e. from 1595 on) would be potentially spurious, as we would be comparing an earlier with a later stage of vocabulary development. At the same time, the evidence of the later stage cannot be discounted, as it is always possible that certain words are missing from the earlier texts by chance. But there are plainly two stages of plausibility, and these are identified in this paper as Corpus A (the above twelve texts) and Corpus B (S’s later work).

Why vocabulary? Spelling is too uncertain at this period to be a basis for comparison. And with just 17 stanzas, many containing only three two-line sentences, there are too few grammatical constructions in the text to do anything meaningful. The focus of any investigation has thus to be on vocabulary, which here refers to three things:

- **individual words**
- **collocational strings, i.e. lexical associations between specific words, not necessarily adjacent, e.g. helping + hands, bid me stay**
- **colligational strings, i.e. combinations of specific words in a particular grammatical relationship, such as egg + on or beloved + of**

Are all the words and lexical strings in the Danielle corpus found in Corpus A? Table 1 lists 274 individual words. The figures derive from a search of the electronic corpus compiled for the book *Shakespeare’s Words* (www.shakespeareswords.com). Word classes (parts of speech) and grammatical variants are differentiated: different totals are given for love (noun) and love (verb) and for *love* and *loved*, for example.

I excluded Classical names (e.g. Paris) from the analysis, as these relate to knowledge rather than language ability. (Just because I know the words *Frankfurt* and *Stuttgart* does not mean that I can speak German.) I also excluded the names of *Salisbury* and *Stanley*. I included common geographical names, such as *Europe* and *Wales*. Table 1 also shows a list of the grammatical words (such as *the* which) which I ignored.

Of the 274 words analysed, 266 are found in Corpus A. The vocabulary of the Danielle poems is thus very much (97 percent) within what we know S to have used at the time, though none of the words are sufficiently distinctive to suggest that they are ‘favourite’ S words. Even *ruinate*, which is used distinctively in S as a figurative sense of ‘reduce to
ruins' (the OED has him as the first recorded user) is here being used literally – a usage which had been in the language since at least 1548.

Table 2 shows the interesting cases. First of all, there are 8 words which are not in Shakespeare A or B. This total reduces to 6 if (a) gwrder is ignored because it is so unclear, (b) we disregard word-class (in the case of enterprise), and (c) we take the two Latin tags as special cases, part of the conventions of this kind of poem. The 4 problem cases are feminate, glee, manlikest, and roundelay. As S uses gleeful in A, the absence of glee is probably by chance – though it is surprising that S does not use this ancient word at all. S is the first recorded user of roundel, which he uses just once (in MND), but roundelay was available for use in contexts where it was needed to suit the metre and rhyme. The adjective feminate is striking, but this word had been around since at least 1533, and S often coined adjectives ending in -ate (emulate, expiate, eustafficate, felicitate, gratulate, inordinate...). Manlikest is the one that stands out, as there are no other instances of the superlative ending on an adjective ending in -like in S, and it feels awkward.

Another 13 words do not appear in Corpus A, but do turn up in Corpus B. None of these is significant. All of them had been in English a long time. In six cases (finer, gem, helping, recompense, treading, turtles), it is simply a grammatical variant that is missing. In the case of couple, it is a small semantic shift. We are left with Greekish, indite, manlike, paps, tennis balls, and wight, all of which have several 16th-century citations in the OED.

I have not tried to be comprehensive in analysing multi-word strings (the collocations and colligations). I picked out 77 which capture most of the linguistic content of the poem. Of these, 51 (66 percent) are to be found in A and a further 10 (79 percent) in B. Here too, then, the language is largely within S's range. But there are 16 strings completely absent. Of these, two are fortuitous. North Wales is here purely because of the situation – if Hamlet had been set in Conwy Castle, doubtless North Wales would have appeared a lot. And although laurel tree is not there, both laurel and tree are elsewhere in A. There is nothing particularly Shakespearean about nine of the other strings (nor about any of the 10 strings that appear only in B): Britain's soil, courteous of, cure...melancholy, pearl...foil, pen...run...fill, pleasant plains, portion...store, rule...pen, and smooth tongue. In a few cases there are lexical similarities in other texts, such as purge...melancholy; however, there are also differences. When rule takes an object, for example, it is usually a person or place. Only once in S is it an entity (teeth in Cor 3.1.36). There is nothing like rule my pen elsewhere in S.

Two phrasal verbs are unusual: egg on and toss down. They are informal to our modern ears, and we might feel their use in this very conventional text is somewhat inept (an impression which can of course be interpreted either way - as non-S or as immature S); but in Early Modern English the stylistic level might have been more formal, and toss down certainly adds dramatic force to the image. The same point applies to pack thee hence.

That leaves two important usages: in midst (myddest, line 71) and unlike to thee, neither of which are Shakespearean. S uses in the midst always (but note i the midst in Mac 3.4.10), an old usage dating from around 1400. Spenser, by contrast, has several examples of in midst – indeed, he is the first recorded user of it, in 1590. Certainly, there are many examples in S of an optional definite or indefinite article (eg at least vs at the least). But he also uses i th' when he wants to lose a metrical syllable (i' th'midst in AC 3.10.11, Cor 1.1.97), and that is not the case in the Danielle poem. This is perhaps the clearest case in Danielle of a usage which seems to go against S's normal style.

But courteous of (line 15) and unlike to thee (line 29) are also unusual. Courteous followed by of is not found at all (though known in other writers since the 14th century). S uses courteous 22 times; only once is it indirectly followed by a preposition, and that is in: 'For thou art pleasing, gamesome, passing courteous, / But slow in speech' (TS 2.1.239).

S normally uses unlike either alone or followed directly by a noun or pronoun. 'How much unlike art thou Mark Anthony", says Cleopatra (AC 1.5.35). There are 11 instances like this. There are no cases of the word immediately followed by to – though this construction had been around since the 14th century, and was current in the 16th (there are OED citations from Elyot and Olde). He once uses than (unlike than, Cym 5.5.355). Having said that, there
is one instance of a to, but with a word-order change: ‘How much unlike art thou to Portia’ says Arragon (MV 2.9.56). So the parallel is not exact.

Commentators such as John Idris Jones have already noted several lexical and discourse parallels between certain lines and S’s writing, and there is certainly a familiar parallelism in the syntax of stanzas 5, 7 and 8. However, we do not yet know how common these patterns were in the language of the time, so we cannot read too much into them. Certainly, some of the words Jones instances (such as Greekish, sweet, and ten times) were quite common. The negative evidence – patterns which appear in Danielle and which do not appear in S, are somewhat stronger in force, but are not conclusive, given our lack of comparative data.

More detailed analysis is needed, but in a few cases where I have done this the results are ambivalent. Take sweet muses, for example. Sweet turns up 875 times in S, and is indeed one of his favourite words. The interesting point in Danielle, though, is its use as part of a vocative construction. This is a significant S feature, as 384 (44 percent) of his uses of sweet are in vocatives (there is a famous sweet queen sequence sequence in TC 3.1), and 54 of them are in the Sonnets. However, there is only one instance of sweet opening a poem (Sonnet 56). Muse turns up 32 times in S, 16 of them in the Sonnets; but only Sonnets 100 and 101 open with an invocation to a Muse. And no text opens with the collocation of sweet Muse(s). So there is no exact parallel.

Or take lend your helping hands. There are 4 clear cases of the collocation between lend and hand in S: lend me your hands (Per 3.2.107), lend thy hand (Tem 1.2.23), and lend me thy hand (Tit 3.1.186, WT 4.3.67 and 68). Helping hands turns up in R2 4.1.161. But in TNK the collocation is hold out your helping hands (Prologue 26). Again, there is no exact parallel.

I have to take a view. On the lexical evidence, it is certainly possible that the texts could be by S, for only a small number of usages fall outside his lexical range in 1593/4; but in midst, manlikest, courteous of, and (less certain) unlike to suggest it is not. Are these few problem cases enough to outweigh the general finding that the lexical range of the Danielle poems corresponds to S’s other usage? People will have different views; but, as scientists say, it takes only one good counter-example to demolish a hypothesis, so perhaps the next step is a thorough discussion of these cases. In the meantime, and until we have much better lexical studies of early Modern English, the ascription of the text to S on linguistic grounds has to remain doubtful. However, as I said at the outset, linguistic evidence alone rarely suffices in questions of authorship.
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**Grammatical words ignored**

a, against, all, am, and (&), art, as, be, but, can, cannot, did, do, doth, down, each, for, from, gainst, had, hast, he, her, herself, him, his, I, if, I'll, in, is, it, like, many, may, me, more, must, my, no, not, of, off, on or, 's (is), shall, she, should, since, so, some, such, that, the, thee, their, they, this, thou, thy, 'tis, to, too, 'twere, unto, upon, us, was, were, what, when, which, whom, why, will, with, within, without, would, ye, you, your

**Encyclopedic words ignored**

Admetus, Corydon, Derby, Denbigh, Diana, Helen, Man, Paris, Phyllida, John Salusbury, Anne Stanley, Troy

### Table 2 Interesting usages in the Danielle poems

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<th>In Corpus B?</th>
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*Date of paper: November 2006*
The Danielle Poems


XXI

Sweet mvses come & lend your helpinge handes
to Rule my penne which quakinge standes to write
ffear bides me stay but hope doth egge me on
to putt in practize what's my hartes delight
ffayne would I write so 'twere without offence
I'le venter once my mvse goe packe thee hence

Goe blasse abrod the prid of Britance soyle
for vertue manhood and for curtesie
The onely perle which all proud wale doth foyle
for kindly favour and sobrietie
Kind vnto all both high & lowe degree
to Riche & poore is worthy Salusbury

Beloued of all and loyed of each wight
feared of his foes & loued of his friendes
Courteous of speech & show to all mens sight
free of his purse, the flowre of all his kine
Where e're I goe whiles lif doth last in me
my tonge shall speake of courteus Salusbury

Did Troy but stand which nowe lyes ruinate
& beauteus helen liueing in the same
Should paris thinke with face so feminate
or smooth tounge wordes to wynne that grekish dame
No 'twere in vayne to enterprise that deed
since Salusbury lives that paris doth exceed.

Was paris beautiful? why so is Salusbury,
was paris courteus? Salusbury is more kind
Was paris manlike? & is not Salusbury
the manlikest wight in Britaine you can find
In all respectes paris vnlike to thee
Helen revives to love sweete Salusbury

Yf Salusbury did enjoye faire Helens love
& had her salf within the wales of troy
The greekes were best their siege for to remoove
for 'twere in vayne gainst Salusbury to enjoy
His manlike armes ffrom of the greekish wales
would tosse downe pilleres like to tennis bales
Blest be the pappes that first did give him sucke
blest be the wombe that first did him conceyve
Blest be the tyme his father had such looke
blest be the tree which sprung forth such a lefe
Blest be they all & tenne tymes blest be he
for whome so many blessinges vted be

Curst may they be that Salusbury seekes to wronge
curst may they be that Salusbury seekes to shame
Curst may they be that with their slanderous tounge
seekes to slander sweete John Salusburys name
Curst be they all & tenne tymes curst be he
that speaks one worde against sweete Salusbury

Hence myste I goe but myses stay you heare
I must departe yet shew you my good will
When I ame gon see that you doe not feare
to shew your masteres fruities of simple skill
for while he lives where e're he goe or ride
sweete John Salusburys name shall in him bide

Denbighe adew pray thou for Salusbury
north wales adew pray ye for Salusbury
The sweetest gemme that cures your melencolie
is kind & faire & courteus Salusbury
Pray you for him & I will pray for yee
so god bless vs & courteous Salusbury

Nowe myses stay I may no longer write
to dolle ame I to speake of Salusbury prais
Some finer wittes hearafter shall indite
& putt his name in coridons roondelays
Then sweete philida & coridon agree
to singe in prays of lovinge Salusbury

And I'le intreat dianas trayne to stand
& putt ye help with all their silver stringes
The nimphes shall dance with Salusbury hand in hand
treadinge the measures on the pleasant plaines
And thus in myddest of all his mirth & glee
I'le take my leaue of courteus Salusbury

Finis quoth Danielle.
XXII

But stay a while thou hast forgott thy parte
returne againe & ere thou goe ffrom hence
Thinke vpon her whome thou arte bound in harte
in humble duty for to recompence
ffor whom he loves shee neuer hates I see
so kind & courteus is m[istress] Salusbury

ffrom princely blood & Ryale stocke she came
of egles brood hatcht in a loftie nest
The earle of derby & the kinge of manne
her father was her brother now possest
Then hapie he but thris more hapie's shee
to mache her self with lovely Salusbury

A lovelier man all europe cannot find
so kid to her & she so kind to him
Like turtles true so doth this cuple buyl'd
heauens graunte this their ioyes may ne're be dime
But flwrish still as doth the lawrel tree
& hartes content rest both to him & shee

Nowe mvst I goe my penne hath runne his fill
gould have I not to gwrder her with all
Butu yet to shew some parte of my good will
thebest I have I humblie parte with all
Accept it then a portion of my store
'tis my good will would god 'twere tenne tymes more

Thus for my bowldnes pardon I do crave
prayeinge the heauens to send you both content
loy of your ofspringe euer for to have
Admetus lif'nto you both be lent
God keepe your troope both high & lowe degree
tho last not lest vale m[istress] Ane stanley
finis quoth Danielle