THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO

SHAKESPEARE

Edited by Margreta de Grazia and Stanley Wells

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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO SHAKESPEARE

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ERNST HONIGMANN

Shakespeare's life

SEVEN years after Shakespeare's death his former 'fellows' or colleagues published the first collected edition of his plays, the great Folio of 1623, 'only to keep the memory of so worthy a friend and fellow alive as was our Shakespeare'. *Our* Shakespeare! The phrase, which has re-echoed down the centuries, was probably in use before his death in 1616. In Spain, a contemporary recorded, Lope de Vega 'is accounted of . . . as in England we should of our Will Shakespeare'. This was how one referred to a classic ('our Virgil', 'our Spenser'), more commonly after his death, and Shakespeare was seen as a classic in his lifetime. The anonymous writer of a preface to *Troilus and Cressida* (1609) said so quite explicitly: the play deserves a commentary 'as well as the best comedy in Terence or Plautus'.

The friends who published the Folio loved and admired the man as well as his works. Ben Jonson contributed a poem 'to the memory of my beloved, the author, Mr. William Shakespeare', and later wrote, 'I loved the man and do honour his memory, on this side idolatry, as much as any.' He was gentle Shakespeare, sweet Shakespeare, good Will, friendly Shakespeare – that, at least, seems to have been the majority verdict. A minority saw him in a less agreeable light.

Born in 1564 in provincial Stratford-upon-Avon, he was the eldest surviving child of John and Mary Shakespeare. John is thought to have been the son of Richard, a husbandman in Snitterfield (four miles from Stratford) who held lands as a tenant of Robert Arden, gentleman. Arden's daughter, Mary, inherited fifty acres when her father died in 1556, and not long after married John Shakespeare. John and Mary therefore belonged to different social levels; John, like his son William, proved to be 'upwardly mobile'.

John Shakespeare is first heard of in Stratford in 1552, when he was fined one shilling for building an unauthorized dunghill or muck-heap in Henley Street. (In Stratford, as in London, excrement and other refuse must have been a familiar sight in public streets.) We assume that John already lived in this street, in the house now known as his son's birthplace. He worked as a glover and whittawer (a curer and whitener of skins), but he also became 'a considerable dealer in wool' (Nicholas Rowe, in his *Life* of Shakespeare, 1709, confirmed by recently discovered records), he sold barley and timber, and he bought houses, including the one adjoining his house in Henley Street. In addition to his probably complex

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business dealings he participated in civic affairs and rose from minor duties to hold office as chamberlain, member of the town council, alderman, and, in 1568, high bailiff (we would say 'mayor'). He signed official documents with his mark, which may mean that he could not write, though this does not necessarily follow. Whether or not he was illiterate he must have had a good head for business since he was asked to take charge of civic accounts. Is it not likely, though, that Shakespeare's parents were both remarkable people?

Having prospered for some twenty years, John ran into difficulties in the late 1570s. He was let off paying his weekly 4d. for poor relief; he failed to attend council meetings, and consequently was deprived of his alderman's gown (1586); he mortgaged part of his wife's inheritance. It could be that he only pretended to be poor and withdrew from council business for religious reasons – if, like many others, he became a 'recusant' when Queen Elizabeth succeeded Mary in 1558, i.e. he refused to give up the 'Old Faith', Roman Catholicism. Recusants were persecuted more vigorously just when John Shakespeare's difficulties started and were fined for non-attendance at church, and his name appears in a list of non-attenders: apparently he alleged that he stayed away because he feared that he might be arrested for debt. Nevertheless he continued to own houses in Stratford; in 1580, summoned to appear in court at Westminster, he was fined £40 (equivalent to a schoolmaster's salary for two years) for non-appearance. The court, we are told, would not have imposed such a fine if John was believed unable to pay. Did his fortunes really decline, or did he withdraw from the council because, as a recusant, he did not wish to take part in punishing other Catholics? The evidence is not clear.

John Shakespeare died in 1601, and Mary in 1608. We are granted one glimpse of John some fifty years after his death. 'Sir John Mennis saw once his old father in his shop – a merry-cheeked old man that said "Will was a good honest fellow, but he durst have cracked a jest with him at any time."' Who durst – father or son? If the son, this suggests that he sometimes made jests out of season, which is confirmed by other early anecdotes.[1]

John and Mary sent their son to 'a free school' (Rowe), probably the King's New School at Stratford. Here he learned Latin grammar, read Aesop's *Fables*, then moved on to the usual classics: Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (frequently quoted or alluded to in his later writings), Plautus (whose *Menaechmi* and *Amphitruo* supplied the plot for *The Comedy of Errors*), Terence, Virgil, Cicero, and no doubt many others. English and modern European literature and history were not taught at this time. The successive masters at his school, Oxford graduates, several of whom were Catholics or had Catholic connections, were paid £20 a year plus housing. Ben Jonson later wrote disparagingly of Shakespeare's 'small Latin and less Greek': by Jonson's own standards this may have been fair comment, yet Shakespeare probably read Latin as easily as most graduates 'with Honours in Latin' today. It was once thought that he was ignorant of Greek

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tragedy; not so, it is now said, he knew some Greek tragedies, either in the original or in Seneca's adaptations.

If, as was usual, Shakespeare left school at fifteen or sixteen, what did he do next? According to Rowe, his father 'could give him no better education than his own employment', while a Mr Dowdall (1693) thought that he was 'bound apprentice to a butcher'. John Aubrey heard from the son of one of Shakespeare's colleagues that 'he understood Latin pretty well, for he had been in his younger years a schoolmaster in the country'. Another theory takes us north, to Lancashire, where a wealthy Catholic esquire, Alexander Hoghton, recommended William 'Shakeshafte' to his neighbour, Sir Thomas Hesketh, and at the same time bequeathed him his 'instruments belonging to musics and all manner of play clothes' (August 1581). Was Shakeshafte a player, and could he have been Shakespeare? Could he have worked as an assistant 'schoolmaster in the country' for Hoghton? (The performance of plays by boys was recommended by forward-looking schoolmasters). If so, it would imply that at this date Shakespeare was also a Catholic.

From Hoghton and Hesketh he could have transferred to the service of Lord Strange, a more important Lancashire magnate in whose company, reconstituted as the Lord Chamberlain's Men, we find Shakespeare in 1594. Lord Strange was also suspected of Catholic sympathies.

The curious forms that names could take puzzle us again when, on 27 November 1582, the Bishop of Worcester issued a licence for the marriage of 'Willelmum Shaxpere et Annam Whateley de Temple Grafton'. The next day a bond was signed to protect the bishop, in case the marriage of William 'Shagspere' and Anne 'Hathwey' led to legal proceedings, since William was a minor and Anne was pregnant. Some think that 'Whateley' was a misreading of Hathaway, others that Shakespeare, aged 18, would have preferred not to marry Anne Hathaway, aged 26. It must be added that names – like spelling – could wobble at this time. Shakespeare is 'Shaxberd' in the Revels accounts of 1604–5, Christopher Marlowe also appears as 'Morley' and 'Marlin'.

Anne Hathaway, probably the eldest daughter of Richard Hathaway, a husbandman in Shottery, lost her father in September 1581 and nine months later gave birth to her first child, Susanna (baptized 26 May 1583). On 2 February 1585 the twins Hamnet and Judith were baptized (Hamnet being a variant form of Hamlet); doubtless their godparents were Hamnet and Judith Sadler, family friends.

After 1585 William and Anne produced no more children (unusual in those days: William's parents had eight children over a period of twenty-two years). It may have been shortly thereafter that he left home for a career in the theatre. We first hear of him as an actor and dramatist in 1592, from a rival dramatist who believed that he suffered neglect because of Shakespeare's great popularity. In his *Groat's Worth of Wit* Robert Greene addressed three 'gentlemen, his

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quondam acquaintance, that spend their wits in making plays' (Marlowe, Peele, Nashe) and denounced 'an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his "Tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide" supposes he is as well able to bombast out [i.e. write] a blank verse as the best of you: and, being an absolute Johannes fac totum, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country'. The pun in Shake-scene and ridicule of a line from *3 Henry VI* ('O tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide') leave us in no doubt as to Greene's target. He sneered at an upstart actor who dared to compete with his betters, gentlemen dramatists who had been to university (Shakespeare had not), one who thought his bombastic blank verse superior to theirs, and who threatened to put them all out of business.

Greene, I think, continued his attack in *Groat's Worth of Wit* with an allusion to the fable of the ant and the grasshopper. The grasshopper enjoyed himself in the summer, the ant toiled to prepare for winter. When winter arrived, the grasshopper 'went for succour to the ant his old acquaintance, to whom he had scarce discovered his estate but the waspish little worm made this reply, "Pack hence," quoth he, "thou idle lazy worm . . ."' The grasshopper died, and, concluded Greene, 'like him, myself: like me, shall all that trust to friends or time's inconstancy'. Can we doubt that the busy ant, pursuing two separate careers as actor and writer, drove himself hard? 'Weary with toil I haste me to my bed' (Sonnet 27).

Greene picked on the line from *3 Henry VI* to accuse gentle Shakespeare of having a 'tiger's heart', a charge apparently repeated in 'the waspish little worm'. If we accept that Greene had Shake-scene in mind as the relentless ant, the circumstances become clearer, from Greene's point of view. Shakespeare, we may hope, would have told a different tale. Henry Chettle, who had prepared Greene's pamphlet for the press, apologized: various gentlemen vouched for Shakespeare's 'uprightness of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his facetious [polished; witty] grace in writing, that approves [confirms] his art'. Greene's public attack must have pained Shakespeare, and it is not impossible that he reflected on it in Sonnet 112:

> Your love and pity doth th'impression fill
> Which vulgar scandal stamped upon my brow;
> For what care I who calls me well or ill,
> So you o'ergreen my bad, my good allow? (1–4)

At least one other contemporary, it seems, thought like Greene about Shakespeare. In the anonymous pamphlet *Ratsey's Ghost* (1605) a player is advised to go to London and 'play Hamlet' for a wager. 'There thou shalt learn to be frugal . . . and to feed upon all men, to let none feed upon thee; to make thy hand a stranger to thy pocket . . . and when thou feelest thy purse well lined, buy thee some place or lordship in the country . . .' The player answers that he will do so, 'for I have heard indeed of some that have gone to London very meanly, and

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have come in time to be exceeding wealthy'. The allusions (Hamlet, New Place – see p. 6 – and going to London) point to Shakespeare rather than Edward Alleyn, the only other player rich enough to buy a 'place' in the country, for Alleyn was a Londoner born and could not 'go to London' at the start of his career.

Greene's fable may help us with another unsolved problem. When did Shakespeare begin his theatrical career? The grasshopper calls the ant 'old acquaintance', which supports the view that he had been around in the theatrical world for some years, i.e. had made an 'early start' (1586 or 1587), not a 'late start' (1590). The late start is still widely supported, yet there are good reasons for the early start which, if correct, could mean that Marlowe (also born in 1564) was not Shakespeare's predecessor as a playwright, as stated in older textbooks, but his exact contemporary.

We next hear of Shakespeare in 1593 and 1594. He dedicated his *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* to the young Earl of Southampton (born 1572), the 1593 dedication being couched in formal language ('I know not how I shall offend in dedicating my unpolished lines to your lordship . . .'). The later one indicates that Southampton responded positively.

> The love I dedicate to your Lordship is without end, whereof this pamphlet without beginning is but a superfluous moiety. The warrant I have of your honourable disposition, not the worth of my untutored lines, makes it assured of acceptance. What I have done is yours, what I have to do is yours being part in all I have, devoted yours.

We assume that Shakespeare wrote these poems because plague caused the closing of London's theatres, from the summer of 1592 to the spring of 1594, and he was cut off from his normal income. He and his colleagues, now the Lord Chamberlain's Men, resumed acting in 1594, and performed twice at court in the Christmas season. Three of their leaders signed a receipt for £20 – Richard Burbage, William Kempe, and Shakespeare. Burbage was a gifted tragic actor, Kempe an outstanding clown, and Shakespeare – ? The receipt proves that by 1594 he had won a prominent place in his company. Indeed, Greene – identifying no other actor – implied that Shakespeare helped to lead his fellows as early as 1592, perhaps as their business manager.

Shakespeare's business acumen must have been quite exceptional. In the course of time, as he prospered, he took on new responsibilities, with four distinct roles in his company: (1) 'sharer', one of ten or so owners of the company's assets (play-books, play clothes, properties); (2) 'house-holder', one of the owners or lease-holders of the Globe and Blackfriars theatres; (3) dramatist; (4) actor. Other dramatists were paid from £6 to £12 per play, prices that were clearly negotiable. Shakespeare must have known that his plays were his company's most precious asset, and might have demanded much more than others. He seems to have written, on average, two plays a year until 1602 or so, and thereafter one a year, and this could have been his major contribution.

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husband. For example, he bequeathed a sum of £150 to Judith, provided that 'such husband as she shall at the end of . . . three years be married unto . . . do sufficiently assure unto her and the issue of her body lands answerable to [i.e. as valuable as] the portion by this my will given' – an unlikely eventuality. And if Judith lived for three years, the sum of £150 was to be spent for her benefit by the executors, but 'not to be paid unto her so long as she shall be married'. Clearly Shakespeare had no confidence in Thomas Quiney. A tiger's heart wrapped in a father's hide!

He also left bequests to many others, including his only surviving sibling, his sister Joan. She, married to a hatter, was to retain tenancy of the house in which she lived for the yearly peppercorn rent of 12d., and she was to have £50, which the executors were to pay to her or to her sons (i.e. not to her husband). Shakespeare, evidently a very sick man who could only just sign his name, also deleted a bequest to Richard Tyler, who was still alive, and there are other signs of his displeasure. It is in this context that we have to place the single reference to Anne Hathaway – 'Item, I give unto my wife my second-best bed with the furniture' (hangings, coverlets, bed-linen). Had he provided for Anne before he made his will, as some have supposed? Wills of the period often made this explicit. We do not know. There are various signs, however, that he was not a happy husband: the possibility of a shot-gun wedding in 1582; the fact that Anne had no more children after 1585; Aubrey's report that 'he was wont to go into Warwickshire once a year'; stories that link Shakespeare with other women, including the dark lady of the Sonnets; the fact that in purchasing the Gatehouse he brought in three trustees, which had the effect of barring his widow from any right to the property; the curt reference to 'my wife' in the will (testators generally said 'my loving wife'), and the fact that she was not asked to be an executor. He named his daughter Susanna and her husband, Dr John Hall, as his executors, and Susanna as his principal heir (his son, Hamnet, had died in 1596).

Greene (1592) and *Ratsey's Ghost* (1605) reveal Shakespeare as seen by his enemies; his will (1616) confirms that he had a stern, unyielding side. Our only rounded picture of Shakespeare the man is found in his Sonnets – one so extraordinary that many biographers prefer not to take it seriously (see also chapter 5, Shakespeare's Poems, by John Kerrigan). Here he depicts himself as abnormally vulnerable and emotional, often almost unable to control his emotions, whether high or low, and inclined to withdraw from difficult confrontations. He seems to have written many of the Sonnets to explain feelings that he could not express face to face. He adores a 'lovely boy' or young man, probably a nobleman's son, he dotes on a dark lady, and both betray him. He is too forgiving to the young man and knows it (Sonnets 35, 40–2, 70), and, some will say, spiteful to the dark lady (137). Nevertheless he also addresses sharp words to the young man ('thou dost common grow', 'Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds', 69, 94), and can write tenderly to the dark lady (128). Being Shakespeare, he sees the ridicu-

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lousness of his own position (143). The Sonnets, of course, must not be read as 'straight' autobiography – yet why dismiss them as too extraordinary to be credible? Shakespeare was not an 'ordinary' or 'normal' man.

The publisher dedicated the Sonnets 'To the only begetter [inspirer?] of these ensuing sonnets, Mr W. H.', I assume without Shakespeare's permission. Whether or not the poet's love for the young man was homosexual (this is much debated), it might certainly be thought so, which – in view of the penalties against homosexual acts – would be dangerous. Mentioned by Francis Meres in 1598 as Shakespeare's 'sugared sonnets among his private friends', these superb poems remained unpublished for at least eleven years, with the exception of two that appeared in the pirated *Passionate Pilgrim* (1599), and, just as surprisingly, were not reissued between 1609 and 1640. This suggests, I think, that they were thought to be 'compromising'.

Several identifications of the young man have been proposed, including Henry Wriothesley, the Earl of Southampton (W. H. transposed?). Recent biographers have favoured William Herbert, later the Earl of Pembroke and dedicatee of the First Folio, in my view correctly. This W. H., born in 1580, was for many years a generous patron of Ben Jonson, and there are grounds for thinking Jonson the 'rival poet' of the Sonnets, who caused Shakespeare much grief (e.g. Sonnets 78–86). The rival competed for the young man's patronage: he paraded his learning, putting Shakespeare in the shade, he was proud, a polished poet, a flatterer, so overbearing that Shakespeare preferred not to engage with him (and felt that this needed an explanation):

> My tongue-tied muse in manners holds her still
> While comments of your praise, richly compiled,
> Reserve thy character with golden quill
> And precious phrase by all the muses filed.
> I think good thoughts whilst other[s] write good words,
> And like unlettered clerk still cry 'Amen'
> To every hymn that able spirit affords
> In polished form of well-refinèd pen.
> Hearing you praised I say ''Tis so, 'tis true,'
> And to the most of praise add something more;
> But that is in my thought . . . (85.1–11)

A 'tongue-tied' Shakespeare? Other sonnets present the same evasive, introverted personality (e.g. 23, 80, 83, 86, 128, 140) and yet early allusions refer to his unabashed quickness in repartee (cf. p. 2). So, too, early allusions depict him as a boon companion, whereas Aubrey recorded that 'he was not a company keeper, lived in Shoreditch, wouldn't be debauched, and if invited to [be debauched?], wrote he was in pain'. Contradictions? Why, though, expect a rigidly consistent Shakespeare? Do we not feel close to him in both Hamlet and Falstaff?

Shakespeare and Jonson perhaps tippled together in taverns, and had a

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relationship of sorts for many years. Jonson repeatedly criticized Shakespeare and his plays, and on at least one occasion gentle Shakespeare may have retaliated. In the third Cambridge Parnassus play (1601?) Will Kempe says 'O that Ben Jonson is a pestilent fellow, he brought up Horace giving the poets a pill [in *Poetaster*], but our fellow Shakespeare hath given him a purge that made him beray [foul] his credit [i.e. shit himself].' Jonson was Shakespeare's only major and persistent critic. He was jealous, and could not bear to praise the 'sweet swan of Avon' until after his great rival's death.

In the present century we have learned much about his friends and associates, less about Shakespeare. An American, C. W. Wallace, discovered law-suits that give us vivid pictures of Richard Burbage and his father and, even more important, the Belott–Mountjoy suit of 1612. Stephen Belott had served as apprentice to Mountjoy, a French Huguenot, and had married his master's daughter in 1604. Shakespeare, then a lodger in Mountjoy's house, deposed that he had known the parties for ten years or so, and that he was asked to persuade Belott to marry Mary Mountjoy. He recalled that Mountjoy promised to give a 'portion' with Mary, 'but what certain portion he remembereth not'. A diplomatic loss of memory? He signed his deposition, one of only six surviving signatures. It is sometimes transliterated as 'Willm Shakp' but, as C. J. Sisson pointed out to me almost fifty years ago, it ends with a penman's flourish and should read 'Willm Shak.' Compare 'Mr Wm. Shak.' (p. 7 above).

The discoveries of Leslie Hotson, a Canadian, match Wallace's in importance. After *The Death of Christopher Marlowe* (1925) he published, in *Shakespeare versus Shallow* (1931), documents involving various persons close to the theatrical world. Francis Langley, the owner of the Swan theatre, claimed 'sureties of the peace' (i.e. the protection of the law) against William Gardiner, a Southwark JP, and William Wayte; Wayte then claimed 'sureties' against William 'Shakspere', Langley, Dorothy Soer, and Anne Lee (1596). Hotson argued that Gardiner and Wayte were lampooned as Justice Shallow and Slender in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. His most exciting detective-work followed in *I, William Shakespeare* (1937), an account of Thomas Russell, Esq., a friend named as overseer (assistant to the executors) in Shakespeare's will. Russell owned an estate at Alderminster, four miles from Stratford, and was the stepfather of Sir Dudley and Leonard Digges. Sir Dudley probably gave Shakespeare access to William Strachey's unpublished letter to the Council of the Virginia Company, describing a shipwreck in the Bermudas: this suggested details for *The Tempest*. Leonard Digges, born in 1588, young enough to be Shakespeare's son, contributed verses to the First Folio and a longer memorial poem printed later (1640). He revered Shakespeare the man and the 'fire and feeling' of his plays.

> Be sure, our Shakespeare, thou canst never die,
> But, crowned with laurel, live eternally.

Again, *our* Shakespeare!

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Many stories circulated in Shakespeare's lifetime and after his death from less well-informed sources – the 'Shakespeare mythos'. They portrayed him as a poacher, a hard drinker, a lover, and of course a master at repartee. There may well be some truth in some of these anecdotes, or are they too good to be true? John Manningham recorded one in his diary in 1602. When Burbage played Richard III, a woman in the audience made an assignation with him

> to come that night unto her by the name of [i.e. using as password] Richard the Third. Shakespeare, overhearing their conclusion [arrangement], went before, was entertained and at his game ere Burbage came. Then message being brought that Richard the Third was at the door, Shakespeare caused return to be made that William the Conqueror was before Richard the Third.

A story more in character with the ethos of the plays, though not of the Sonnets, we owe to Sir Nicholas L'Estrange (mid-seventeenth century).

> Shakespeare was godfather to one of Ben Jonson's children, and after the christening, being in a deep study, Jonson came to cheer him up and asked him why he was so melancholy. 'No, faith, Ben,' says he, 'not I. But I have been considering a great while what should be the fittest gift for me to bestow upon my godchild, and I have resolved at last.' 'I prythee what?' says he. 'I'faith, Ben, I'll e'en give him a dozen good latten spoons, and thou shalt translate them.'

Notice two puns. Translate could mean 'transform'; godfathers usually gave silver spoons, latten being a cheap alloy. Here Shakespeare appears to smile at Jonson's condescending view of his rival's small Latin and less Greek.

Shakespeare died on 23 April 1616, his widow on 6 August 1623. Their daughters outlived them – Susanna till July 1649, Judith till February 1662. Judith's three sons died without issue; Susanna's only child, Elizabeth, was married twice, first to Thomas Nash, and after his death to John (later Sir John) Bernard. Elizabeth died childless: with her death in 1670 the descent from Shakespeare became extinct.

The story of Shakespeare's life includes many unsolved puzzles, explained differently by different biographers. My account will displease traditionalists on many points – John Shakespeare's 'difficulties', William's possible sojourn in Lancashire, his marriage, the relentless ant, his carefulness with money, the 'early start' of his writing career, his will, his relationship with his wife, his personality as revealed in the Sonnets, his possible homosexuality, his religion. I have discussed these matters elsewhere, at greater length.[2] Of course, I agree with traditionalists more often than I disagree.

'He was indeed honest', Jonson summed up after Shakespeare's death, 'and of an open and free nature; had an excellent fancy, brave notions and gentle expressions.' Like so many other allusions, this one needs to be translated into modern English. Jonson probably meant 'He was indeed an honourable man, and of an unreserved and spontaneous nature; had an excelling imagination, fine ideas and admirable ways of expressing himself.'[3]

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Notes

1. The best example is Shakespeare's alleged extempore epitaph for his Stratford friend, John Combe, 'an old gentleman noted thereabouts for his wealth and usury' (Rowe): 'Ten in the hundred lies here engraved, / 'Tis a hundred to ten, his soul is not saved. / If anyone ask who lies in this tomb / "O ho!" quoth the devil, "'tis my John-a-Combe!"'
2. It should be noted that these puzzles in Shakespeare's life remain unsolved: I mention interesting possibilities, but do not regard them as certainties. And it does not follow that, if Shakespeare was brought up as a Catholic (a possibility), the plays we know were written by a Catholic. Many Catholics became Protestants in his lifetime, including John Donne and Ben Jonson. See my *Shakespeare's Impact on his Contemporaries* (London: Macmillan, 1982) for Greene and Shakespeare, Jonson and Shakespeare, Shakespeare's personality, the 'early start'; *Shakespeare: The 'Lost Years'* (Manchester University Press, 1985, revised edn 1998) for Shakespeare's father, Shakespeare in Lancashire, his religion; *Myriad-minded Shakespeare: Essays on the Tragedies, Problem Comedies and Shakespeare the Man*, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1998) for Shakespeare's personality, his will, his marriage. Also my essay 'The First Performances of Shakespeare's Sonnets' in *Shakespeare Performed: Essays in Honor of R. A. Foakes*, ed. Grace Ioppolo (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000) for 'Mr W. H.' and the rival poet.
3. All contemporaries of Shakespeare and later commentators cited in this chapter can be identified through the indexes of E. K. Chambers, Park Honan, and Samuel Schoenbaum (see below).

Reading list

Chambers, E. K., *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930).

Fripp, E. I., *Shakespeare, Man and Artist*, 2 vols. (Oxford University Press, 1938).

Honan, Park, *Shakespeare A Life* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

Schoenbaum, Samuel, *William Shakespeare: A Documentary Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

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If the eighteenth-century editors had reflected, he says,

> they would have seen that if we want Shakespeare's original text the only place where we have any chance of finding it is in a quarto or folio which is at the head of a line of descent, and that if descendants of such a quarto or folio have different readings from their ancestor, those readings must be either accidental corruptions or deliberate alterations by compositors or proof-readers, and can in no case have an authority superior to, or even as great as, the readings of the text from which they differ.[6]

McKerrow's thesis about eighteenth-century editorial theory and practice was exemplified and articulated by Lewis Theobald, perhaps the first great Shakespeare editor. Theobald describes his work as comparable to that of editors of classical manuscripts and prides himself on adopting their 'Method of cure' for corrupt texts. 'Our Author', he writes in his 1733 preface, 'has lain under the Disadvantage of having his Errors propagated and multiplied by Time: because, for near a Century, his Works were republish'd from the faulty Copies without the assistance of any intelligent Editor: which has been the Case likewise of many a *Classic* Writer.' Because 'Shakespeare's case has in a great Measure resembl'd that of a corrupt *Classic* . . . the Method of cure was likewise to bear a Resemblance.' Emboldened by 'the success [with which] this cure has been effected on ancient writers', Theobald 'ventur'd on a Labour, that is the first Assay of the kind on any modern Author whatsover' – i.e. the 'Restoring to the Publick their greatest Poet in his Original Purity' (p. xxxviii).

This editorial 'Restoring' proceeded as if all early printings of a play – including the later Folios and later printings of the quartos – carried potential authority. For editors of classical manuscripts in the eighteenth century, such a procedure was proper: any given manuscript recension that survived into the eighteenth century might be considered as representing a distinct manuscript line, and each of its variants was therefore worthy of consideration in the reconstruction of the text.[7] It now seems self-evident that the editing of printed books must proceed by first establishing the relationship among the early printed texts and that it must recognize that 'variants' in a reprint of an edition are probably the result of printing-house error. The inference that follows from that recognition – one that eighteenth-century editors did not make until the 1760s – is that, for Shakespeare's texts, 'readings in a late text which differed from those of an earlier one from which it had itself been printed could not possibly be of any authority' (McKerrow, p. 29). Samuel Johnson understood this principle in theory, but he continued to edit as if he did not quite accept it, and even so canny an editor as Capell wrote in his 'Introduction' that, while he tried to follow the oldest printing of a given Shakespeare text, it often 'became proper and necessary to look into the other old editions, and to select from thence whatever improves the Author'.[8]

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The fact that eighteenth-century editors treated the early printings as if they might all have some authority can now be perceived, as it was by McKerrow, as the central problem in their editing of Shakespeare's plays. But the happy corollary of this understanding of the texts is that it led these editors to search out, collect, and eventually collate the otherwise despised quartos – which in turn led to discoveries about the quartos and about their relationship to the Folio that transformed editorial thinking about the reproduction of Shakespeare's texts. In the meantime the editors took as their base text the Folio (for many decades the Fourth Folio) and saw their work as the 'Restoration of the genuine Reading', as Theobald put it. They disagreed violently with each other about their editing practices – Pope degraded to the bottom of the page passages that he suspected of being playhouse additions or corruptions, a practice that Theobald mocked (Pope, he writes, has attacked Shakespeare 'like an unhandy *Slaughterman*; and not lopp'd off the *Errors*, but the *Poet*' (p. xxxv)), while Theobald searched for and proposed better readings to replace the Folio text's 'Depravations', and thus earned a place of infamy in Pope's *Dunciad*. But until the 1760s, editors shared a single larger view of the Shakespeare text, its origins and its pre-eighteenth-century reproduction. Briefly, they agreed that Shakespeare's texts were to be sought for in the Folio (though, in their view, scandalously printed there from manuscripts mutilated by actor–editors). They further agreed that the 'Pieces which stole singly into the World in our Author's Lifetime' – i.e. the quartos – were 'printed from piece-meal Parts surreptitiously obtain'd from the Theatres, uncorrect, and without the Poet's Knowledge' (Theobald, p. xxxviii), and thus, while worth culling for variants, otherwise of little interest.

This theory of the Shakespeare text, premised on the belief that only the Folio texts were worthy of serious consideration as deriving from Shakespeare's hand, collapsed in the 1760s with the discovery that a number of Folio texts had, in fact, been printed from the much maligned quartos. Edward Capell, in the Introduction to his 1767–8 *Mr. William Shakespeare his Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies*, cites instances and lays out evidence that makes a shambles of earlier editorial consensus. Capell first quotes the Heminges and Condell claim mentioned above: 'where before you were abused with diverse stolen and surreptitious copies, maimed, and deformed by the frauds and stealths of injurious impostors, that exposed them: even those are now offered to your view cured, and perfect of their limbs; and all the rest, absolute in their numbers, as he conceived them.' Capell then writes:

> Who now does not feel himself inclin'd to expect an accurate and good performance in the edition of these prefacers? But alas, it is nothing less: for (if we except the six spurious [quartos], whose places were then supply'd by true and genuine copies) the editions of plays preceding the folio, are the very basis of those we have there; which are either printed from those editions, or from the copies which they made use of.

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Along with the 'six spurious quartos' which were not used in the Folio printing, Capell also excepts quartos of plays in which 'there are. . . great variations' between the quarto and Folio texts. But he finds in nine plays

> an almost strict conformity between the [quarto and Folio] impressions . . . the faults and errors of the quarto's are all preserv'd in the folio, and others added to them; and what difference there is, is generally for the worse on the side of the folio editors; which should give us but faint hopes of meeting with greater accuracy in the plays which they first publish'd. (pp. 5–6)

Edmond Malone's 1790 edition echoes Capell (without citing him) and then goes on to state the proper editorial inference. He lists fifteen plays 'printed in quarto antecedent to the first complete collection', and notes that, with regard to thirteen of them, 'instead of printing these plays from a manuscript, the editors of the folio, to save labour, or from some other motive, printed the greater part of them from the very copies which they represented as maimed and imperfect'. He then states: 'Thus therefore the first folio, as far as the plays above numerated, labours under the disadvantage of being at least a second, and in some cases a third, edition of these quartos . . . [which] were in general the basis on which the folio editors built, and are entitled to our particular attention and examination as *first* editions.'[9]

Malone also sets out principles for the proper editing of printed texts. Capell had suggested in a brief remark how he as an editor had chosen for each play the proper text to edit: 'the printed copies are all that is left to guide us . . . our first business then, was – to examine their merit, and see on which side the scale of goodness preponderated; which we have generally found, to be on that of the most ancient' (p. 21). Malone provides not a personal statement but an editorial principle:

> It is well known to those who are conversant with the business of the press, that (unless when the author corrects and revises his own works,) as editions of books are multiplied, their errors are multiplied also; and that consequently every such edition is more or less correct, as it approaches nearer to or is more distant from the first. (p. xiii)

While the relationship between Capell and Malone was in its way as fraught as that between Pope and Theobald, the two editors in effect developed between them a new theory of Shakespeare editing, one in which no early printing is seen as offering access to Shakespeare's mind and hand – his 'True Original Copies' having been exposed as, to their thinking, tainted quartos and dubiously chosen manuscripts – and in which the early printing history of Shakespeare's texts is a central concern. In the Capell–Malone textual world, the editor, while continuing to select variants from among the early printed texts, often gives preference to the quarto text over its Folio counterpart and always edits the first-printed text whenever reprinting can be established. The Shakespeare text

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itself, under the pressure of this new paradigm, changed rather dramatically. Capell in effect began an almost new editorial line, moving away from the Fourth Folio, basing many texts on a given play's quarto printing, and using the First (rather than the Fourth) Folio when a play was first printed there or when, in the case of a play with distinct quarto and Folio printings, he deemed the Folio text the better of the two. The importance of Capell's edition can be judged from the words of G. Blakemore Evans in his essay on 'Shakespeare's Text' in the 1997 *Riverside Shakespeare*: 'A measure of Capell's importance may perhaps be seen in the fact that his name appears more frequently in the Textual Notes to the present edition than that of any later editor.'[10] When Malone constructed his edition in 1790, he incorporated much of Capell's text, and it was this text that continued to be largely reproduced throughout the nineteenth century. One can even argue, as does Evans, that the theory developed by Capell and Malone and the text constructed primarily by Capell and adopted by Malone provided a matrix for Shakespeare editing that extended from the late eighteenth through the early twentieth century, culminating in the 1860s in 'the great Cambridge *Shakespeare*, edited by W. G. Clark and W. A. Wright . . . a text that was to remain . . . the standard for the [following] fifty years' (Evans, p. 62).[11]

To contextualize properly the shift in editorial theory and practice that occurred in the 1760s, as well as the one that occurred in the early twentieth century, it is surprisingly helpful to turn to the insights and language of Thomas Kuhn's influential *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. While Kuhn's work centres on *scientific* revolutions – those moments, that is, when the espoused beliefs of a given scientific community undergo a radical change that alters the basic assumptions and practices of that community – Kuhn's description of the forces that lead to such revolutions and of the subsequent shifts in what he named 'paradigms' provides a remarkably fruitful context for examining the history of the Shakespeare editorial community. In Kuhn's language, the 1760s 'revolution' in the theory and practice of editing Shakespeare's texts was a change brought about through 'novelties of fact'.[12] The new fact discovered (one assumes by Capell)[13] was that a basic premise of then-current editorial theory – that the Folio texts were original authorial manuscripts that replaced mutilated quarto printings – was demonstrably false. This discovery toppled the previous paradigm and enabled Capell and Malone between them to establish a new paradigm and a new text, both of which stood unchallenged for almost one hundred and fifty years. The next 'revolution', when it came in the early twentieth century, came – in Kuhn's terms – through a 'novelty of theory'. New facts were, of course, involved – 'facts' about the registering of manuscripts in the Stationers' Register, facts about the correct dating of the Pavier quartos that encouraged scholars to believe that the printed quartos could yield the careful bibliographer yet more secrets about their history.[14] But the major, transformational shift in thinking about the

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Shakespeare texts was a simple reinterpretation of the Heminges and Condell attack on the quartos.

The credit for this critical reinterpretation belongs to Alfred W. Pollard, who in 1909 broached the question of whether 'all the Shakespeare quartos [were, through Heminges and Condell's words] tainted more or less indiscriminately with piracy and surreptitiousness, or whether it is possible to distinguish between some quartos and others' (p. 64). This question, he notes, is 'of the highest importance for any valuation of the text of the Folio', since if Heminges and Condell condemned as 'maimed' and 'stolen' the very quartos that they then gave to the printers as copy, 'we have no proof of the exercise of any editorial care' for any text in the Folio, and the resulting 'bibliographical pessimism' that extended from Capell and Malone into the early twentieth century was doubtless justified. Pollard answered his own question with the comforting pronouncement that Heminges and Condell had simply been misunderstood and that their reference to 'piratical editions' was only to what Pollard named 'bad quartos' – namely, the quartos of *Henry V*, *Merry Wives*, and *Pericles*, and the first quartos of *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*, none of which had been used in the printing of the Folio. To these five, he wrote,

> the epithets 'stolne and surreptitious' may be applied with any desirable amount of scorn and contempt . . . But they should surely not be applied to any other [of the quartos]. Moreover, we can read our First Folio . . . with all the more confidence because we need no longer believe that its editors in their preface were publicly casting stones at earlier editions which they were privately using . . . in constructing their own text. (p. 80)

A reviewer of Pollard's *Shakespeare Folios and Quartos* wrote in the *Liverpool Courier* for 24 December 1909: 'For the first time we now possess a lucid and rational account of how Shakespeare's plays came to be printed both separately and collectively.' W. W. Greg's response to Pollard was just as enthusiastic. Pollard's book, Greg wrote in 1955, released scholars 'from the quagmire of nineteenth-century despondency' about the early printed texts, a despondency that had resulted from a 'mistaken interpretation of what Heminges and Condell had said'. In Greg's words, 'Pollard raised the banner of revolt against two centuries of pessimism, and linked the correct interpretation [of Heminges and Condell's words] with a fresh insistence on and definition of the distinction between what he named the "good" and the "bad" quartos.' While acknowledging that 'Pollard further linked this distinction with certain views on the subject of copyright that have not stood the test of recent criticism', Greg made the more central point that Pollard's 'main thesis . . . no serious critic now disputes'.[15]

Greg's enthusiasm about Pollard's overturning of the reigning paradigm is understandable. Pollard's reinterpretation restored Heminges and Condell to a

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Despite this strongly optimistic tone, several plays continued to present almost intractable problems. For at least four plays, the disturbing fact emerged that their 'bad' quarto printings could not be ignored. 'Maimed' quartos – believed by most to be the product of abridged performance versions as reported by actors – had been found to have been somehow implicated in the Folio printing of *2 Henry VI*, *3 Henry VI*, and *Henry V*; and the quarto of *Richard III*, known to have been used (in one or more of its later reprints) in the printing of the Folio text and for years classified as an authoritative text, was reclassified as a memorially reconstructed 'bad quarto'. Determining precisely what Shakespeare wrote for these four plays – and especially for *Richard III* – thus involved the editor in balancing the errors likely to have been introduced by the faulty memories of the actors against the errors likely to have been introduced by the Folio (and quarto) compositors (Bowers, 'Shakespeare's Text', pp. 84–5).

The situation with five additional plays – *Troilus and Cressida*, *2 Henry IV*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *King Lear* – was more complicated yet. Each of these plays was seen as existing in two substantive versions, each version printed from one of two relatively 'good' manuscripts (perhaps a 'foul papers' manuscript and a 'promptbook') or one version printed from such a manuscript and the other from that 'good' printing annotated with reference to another 'good' manuscript. For each of these plays, the editor must select one version as 'most authoritative' – closest, that is, to the author's 'foul papers' – and then, having determined the exact derivation of each version, the errors likely to have been introduced into each by the author's carelessness, the scribe, the playhouse bookkeeper, and/or the compositors, use his or her editorial judgement in selecting the 'Shakespearian' word or line at every point where the two texts differ (Bowers, 'Shakespeare's Text', esp. pp. 82–3). As Greg warned, because of the 'circumstances of transmission . . . and the accidents to which the text may have been exposed', Shakespeare's exact words, his 'intention' regarding the text, might not at every point be realized in 'the generally more authoritative edition' (*Editorial Problem*, pp. xxxv, xxix, xxxvi); hence the need for editorial judgement in selecting the words that were Shakespeare's own. And the need for judgement went beyond the individual word. As Greg pointed out, 'many lines of a play as the author wrote it may not appear at all in what is generally the most authoritative edition, and it follows that the copy-text may on occasion need supplementing from another substantive edition', though the editor must 'admit into the text those [additional passages] only which . . . appear to have come from the pen of the author and to have formed part of his finished design' (pp. xxxvi–xxxvii).

The difficulty of determining Shakespeare's 'finished design' behind plays extant in two quite different texts created one fault-line in the massive structure of the new bibliographical paradigm, and it was at this weak point that pressure was first applied. In 1965 E. A. J. Honigmann suggested that the theory of a single authorial manuscript might be inappropriate;[21] by 1980, that suggestion had become a widespread attack on one of the paradigm's central bases. This

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attack, from a 'novelty of theory' proposed by several scholars almost simultaneously, urged that a given Shakespeare play might well have existed in more than one authorially sanctioned version. Stanley Wells recognized immediately the paradigm-threatening implications of the new theory, noting in 1983 both the '*zeitgeist* . . . at work' in developing the theory and the fact that 'acceptance of its implications requires a mental adjustment that may prove painful'.[22] Scholars working out the new theory focused initially on the two significantly different texts of *King Lear*, but *Troilus and Cressida*, *Hamlet*, and *Othello* were then almost immediately presented as exemplars not of single authorial scripts but of printings of separate versions, each authoritative, each with its own integrity.

The attack on the new bibliographical paradigm spread to another vulnerable point when the theory of multiple versions of Shakespeare's plays was extended to include plays printed in 'bad quartos'. Pollard's basic distinction, so freeing to Greg, McKerrow, Wilson, and their followers, and so central to the paradigm, was now held to be invalid and void, and the performability and authority of the quarto printings of *Henry V*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and their fellows were proclaimed and defended.[23]

Simultaneously, and again following on Honigmann's 1965 suggestion, Stephen Orgel attacked the paradigm at yet another vulnerable point: namely, the centrality of the author to editorial theory. In 1981 he wrote:

> Modern scientific bibliography began with the assumption that certain basic textual questions were capable of correct answers: that by developing rules of evidence and refining techniques of description and comparison the relation of editions of a work to each other and to the author's manuscript could be understood, and that an accurate text could thereby be produced. Behind these assumptions lies an even more basic one: that the correct text is the author's manuscript . . . We assume, in short, that the authority of a text derives from the author.

This central assumption, he argued, is simply not true of Shakespeare or his fellow dramatists. Because Shakespeare wrote texts for performance, because such texts were collaborative, were in effect commissioned and owned by the company (not the scriptwriter), and were inevitably always under revision, 'the very notion of "the author's original manuscript" is . . . a figment' and new bibliographical 'emphasis on the author' is 'anachronistic'. Orgel's conclusion is that 'we know nothing about Shakespeare's original text', and that 'what scientific bibliography has taught us more clearly than anything else is that at the heart of our texts lies a hard core of uncertainty'.[24]

While Orgel's challenge draws on factual information about the workings of theatre companies in Shakespeare's day, the thrust is theoretical and potentially devastating to the new bibliographical paradigm. A different attack, one perhaps even more threatening, is from 'novelties of fact'. Beginning in the mid-1980s, William B. Long and Paul Werstine have been arguing that Greg, in setting up his types of dramatic manuscripts – 'foul papers', 'prompt-books', and scribal

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transcripts – in effect misrepresented extant early modern dramatic manuscripts. Because such documents are so rare and so difficult of access, few textual critics could check Greg's representation of the manuscripts' characteristics. Long, Werstine, and others have now carefully examined the documents, and they warn us that the signs that Greg taught textual critics and editors to use in determining the classification of a Shakespeare text in terms of its (hypothetical) manuscript copy simply do not match the characteristics of extant manuscripts.[25] In the first place, as Werstine argues, Greg's 'foul papers' manuscript – which, according to Greg, 'contained the text substantially in the form the author intended it to assume though in a shape too untidy to be used by the prompter' (*Editorial Problem*, p. 31) – is not represented by any extant dramatic manuscript. Further, and more important, the variations in speech headings and the indefinite entrance directions, which Greg isolated as clear signs of 'foul papers' manuscript copy, can be found equally readily in theatrical and scribal manuscripts. The bookkeeper, according to Long, in fact made very few changes to extant authorial or scribal manuscripts, and so-called 'prompt-books' are thus in no way regularized, as Greg had claimed they were (Long, 'Precious Few', p. 417).

The implications of this attack from 'novelties of fact' are huge: namely, there is no way to tell from an early printed text of a Shakespeare play whether it was printed from Shakespeare's holograph or from a play-book. When the force of this attack is joined by such other 'novelties of fact' as newly revised information about how printing houses actually functioned,[26] hardly a 'fact' supporting New Bibliographical assumptions remains standing. This does not mean, though, that the paradigm has lost its hold. Major recent editions of Shakespeare's plays continue to describe their textual principles and practices in determinedly new bibliographical terms. The Oxford *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works* sets itself apart from the more clearly paradigmatic editions by accepting the theory that Shakespeare revised his plays and by choosing to print the version (imagined) closest to the theatre rather than the one closest to Shakespeare's original manuscript. But even in the Oxford edition, the editors' method of determining the provenance of the versions is firmly grounded in Greg's 'foul papers'/'promptbook' categories and characteristics, and the editors' decision to print the performance version seems grounded in part in their belief that the performance version is a Shakespearian revision. (As Michael Bristol put it, 'If there are now two *King Lear*s where before there was only one, that is because both *King Lear*s have been authorized by Shakespeare.')[27] Ironically, then, the Oxford editors, in choosing the performance text to print, choose the text that represents the author's 'final intentions', thus placing themselves comfortably within the paradigm.

Thus, even in the Oxford edition and despite the challenges to the factual bases of new bibliographical theory, the paradigm maintains its hold on the reproduction of Shakespeare's texts. To understand this puzzling state of affairs, it is helpful to turn again to Kuhn, who points out the enormity of what is

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involved in overturning an established paradigm, which is never renounced simply because members of the community uncover 'severe and prolonged anomalies' nor even when the community begins to 'lose faith and then to consider alternatives': 'Once it has achieved the status of paradigm, a scientific theory is declared invalid only if an alternate candidate is available to take its place. The decision to reject one paradigm is always simultaneously the decision to accept another' (p. 77).

In the truly scientific world that Kuhn describes, the only way out of such a crisis as that in which the field of Shakespeare textual criticism currently finds itself would be the establishment of a new paradigm. Since ours is an intellectual rather than an experimental/scientific community, and since the 'world' we study and theorize about is composed not of the material universe but of a set of printed texts, Kuhn's description of paradigm shifts may be far less predictive than it is for, say, modern physics. Note that, despite today's conflicting accounts of the origins of the texts and their subsequent reproductions, editions continue to pour out of the presses and, increasingly, out of computer databases. Many scholars who have most cogently challenged the new bibliographical paradigm are themselves engaged in editing Shakespeare's texts. And new theories about the origins of the plays (Orgel's and Goldberg's theories of the text as an anthology of possible performances; Dutton's theory of Shakespeare's 'literary' text as opposed to the playhouse performance text; Trousdale's theory about the completely indeterminate text)[28] bring not only the (perhaps discouraging) need for 'reconstruction of prior theory and the reevaluation of prior fact', (Kuhn, p. 7) but also intellectual excitement and a new sense of possibilities.

In tracing the broad outlines of the critical and editorial community's response to the printing and reproduction of Shakespeare's texts, I have ignored at every stage a host of forces impinging on that reproduction and have passed over in silence the multitude of fascinating details that make vivid the larger story. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, for example (to take one brief period from this four-hundred-year history), to tell the story of the reproduction of the texts one would need to consider the impact of positivism and its offshoot, the canonization of literary secular saints (Shakespeare pre-eminent among them); one would want to tell about the founding of the Shakspere Society, its fascination with metrical tests, and its odd spawning of disintegrationism; one would describe the explosion in kinds and types of editions – the family editions (Bowdler's, in particular), Furness's New Variorum editions, elaborate pictorial editions, facsimile editions. (A book editor in the 1864 issue of the *Athenaeum* wrote, 'Another, – and another, – the volumes come like Banquo's children, never pausing, never promising to pause. A week that does not bring us a new edition seems to lack a characteristic feature.')[29] One would linger over the editorial ramifications of John Payne Collier's claims to have found a 1632 Folio annotated in a seventeenth-century hand.[30] And one would address the fact that publication in books is not the only (perhaps not the primary) route of 'reproduction' of

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Shakespeare's texts, and would therefore give a parallel account of stage productions, promptbooks, directors, actresses, actors, theatres.

Every half century, perhaps every decade, offers its own version of this controlling philosophical and social context, with its own special fascinations[31] – nor can the story of Shakespeare's texts be fully told or understood without placing the editors, textual critics, and editions in these larger contexts. But for the purposes of this brief survey, the story of the succeeding communities of editors and scholars – their shared commitment to the texts; their absorption of new facts, new theories; their struggles to make sense of the all-too-sparse evidence – provides its own interest. Further, it gives us a way of looking dispassionately at the present moment in Shakespeare textual studies and of looking with hope towards a future in which a new paradigm may be established (one based perhaps in intertextual theory, or in community acceptance of some theory already proposed), or in which the new bibliography may find a way to explain and absorb the factual and theoretical challenges to its hegemony, or in which editing may flourish in the absence of any accepted paradigm. It is possible to see the present editorial moment as a disturbing one, but its unruly state can also be seen as holding considerable excitement and promise.

Notes

1. The terms 'quarto' and 'folio' are printers' designations for the formats of books, folios being made up of sheets of paper folded only once, quartos of sheets of paper folded twice. Quartos are therefore small books, much like today's paperback editions of individual plays; the 1623 Folio is a large volume containing thirty-six plays in double columns.
2. Alfred W. Pollard, *Shakespeare Folios and Quartos: A Study in the Bibliography of Shakespeare's Plays, 1594–1685* (London: Methuen, 1909), p. 164.
3. James Boswell, *The Plays and Poems of William Shakspeare, with the corrections and illustrations of various commentators . . .* [London: 1821], I, xiv.
4. *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies* (London: 1623), Title page [A1], 'To the great Variety of Readers', A3.
5. Lewis Theobald, *The Works of Shakespeare: In Seven Volumes* (London: Bettesworth, Hitch, Tonson . . . 1733), p. xxxviii.
6. Ronald B. McKerrow, 'The Treatment of Shakespeare's Text by his Earlier Editors, 1709–1768'. Annual Shakespeare Lecture of the British Academy. Read 26 April 1933. From the *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. 19, no. 20, p. 21.
7. It was not until the nineteenth century that Karl Lachmann established a 'genealogical' approach to the editing of classical manuscripts, thus transforming manuscript editing.
8. Edward Capell, *Mr William Shakespeare his Comedies, Histories and Tragedies* (London: for J. & R. Tonson, [1768]), I, p. 21.
9. *The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare in 10 Volumes* (London: H. Baldwin, 1790), I, xii–xiii.
10. *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd edn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), p. 62.
11. The Cambridge *Shakespeare* appeared between 1863 and 1866, with an important revision by Wright in 1891–3 and a one-volume version (the Globe edition) appearing in 1864.

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3

LEONARD BARKAN

What did Shakespeare read?

WARWICKSHIRE illiterate; supplier of story-lines to the groundlings; Renaissance polymath. You show me your Shakespeare, and I'll show you a hypothesis about the size and character of his library. We have no hard facts about Shakespeare the reader: no personal documents, no inventories, no annotated volumes with his bookplate. And though his dramatic characters often turn up with books in their hands (sometimes merely *pretending* to read them), we have no neatly autobiographical equivalent of the opening moment in Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*, where the struggling poet consults pages from his predecessors' work. The impossibility of answering the question only adds to its allure, promising to tell us both who Shakespeare was and how he wrote. Do we see the collected works as the product of an uncanny alchemy of sophistication and complexity performed by a provincial with moderate education and limited book-learning? Are they the output of an extraordinarily hard-working craftsman who had a knack for taking what was mostly second-rate contemporary writing and transforming its superficial excitements into more profound forms of high sensation? Or should we accept the proposition that the plays and poems represent a full engagement in the high culture of early modern Europe? In these responses to the matter of Shakespeare's reading one can trace both the history of his reputation and the changing fashions of his critics.

Of all these possibilities, Shakespeare the unlettered country boy deserves most immediate attention because it is the place where both biography and criticism begin. The famous lines on the subject, from the poem that introduces the First Folio, possess every kind of precedence and authority:

> Soul of the age!
> The applause, delight, the wonder of our stage!
> My Shakespeare, rise: I will not lodge thee by
> Chaucer or Spenser, or bid Beaumont lie
> A little further, to make thee a room;
> Thou art a monument without a tomb,
> And art alive still while thy book doth live,
> And we have wits to read, and praise to give . . .
> For if I thought my judgement were of years,
> I should commit thee surely with thy peers:

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And tell how far thou didst our Lyly outshine,
Or sporting Kyd, or Marlowe's mighty line.
And though thou hadst small Latin, and less Greek[1] . . .

Ben Jonson, as ever greatest of collaborators and most problematic of friends, is so masterful an epigrammatist that this last concessive clause will inspire centuries of lore concerning what Shakespeare read. His motives are complex, to say the least, and the very fact that the phrase gets wrenched out of context will only serve to intensify the mixed messages. Jonson is writing a traditional poem of praise and not, at least on the face of it, giving Shakespeare a grade in classics. Rather he begins with a simple paradox, appropriate to issuing the 'Complete Works' seven years after their author's demise: the man is dead, the works live on. In the lines quoted above, Shakespeare is awarded his enduring place within the English Dead Poets' Society; then the subject shifts to his competition with the ancients. The proposition – and it must trouble Jonson, of all people – is that an English writer might enter the company of immortals whom he does not know how to read.

Not that Jonson is being altogether ingenuous. He is himself by auto-proclamation the most learned of authors who descended into the popular world of the theatre. And the classical form of his praise reminds us that there are other writers with large Latin and more Greek. But ancient languages and literatures may not be the ultimate issue here. Jonson's project is to make us understand that Shakespeare is a poet of nature first and of art second; and even if one strand of humanism from the Renaissance to Alexander Pope will declare that Homer and nature are the same, we inevitably inherit a Shakespeare who achieved his magic while being a mediocre reader of the ancients.

Whether that estimate is true or not, there is, alternatively, a large part of Shakespeare's library which Jonson would never have advertised in his eulogy, that enormous body of writings which has been collected under the rubric 'Sources of Shakespeare's Plays'. While some of this material is itself Latin and Greek, this part of Shakespeare's reading has tended to be quite segregated from the canon that Jonson had in mind. However well or badly we imagine Shakespeare knew them, the authors implied in the Folio poem are learned humanist forebears who shed lustre on any modern writer operating under their influence; and that influence itself is understood as operating via a complex set of intellectual mediations. Shakespeare's 'sources', on the other hand, are likelier to be minor figures, sometimes contemporary, often appearing in a sort of *Reader's Digest* form of publication; and this influence, far from being construed as subtle or cerebral, expresses itself as instrumental, opportunistic, or even plagiarizing. The two kinds of reading generally refer to different moments in Shakespeare's life, i.e. his schooling in Stratford v. his daily work as the provider of some two scripts a year to a busy London theatrical company. They have also experienced quite separate fortunes in criticism. The classical predecessors, as

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we have seen, are launched in the very earliest texts promulgating Shakespeare, while in later times they contribute to philosophical and theoretical approaches to the plays. The sources begin to be of interest only in the eighteenth century, when they are often treated as signs of Shakespeare's lack of originality; subsequently, they fuelled whole industries of pedantic attempts to nail down a precise point of origin for his every text.

Our purpose here will be to consider all of this as one related body of material, to declare that 'what Shakespeare read' consists of a lifetime of experience with text, both that which he found in pre-existing books and that which he composed. In opening up the space between the reading and the writing, our topic turns out to be the most old-fashioned and the most new-fashioned of critical subject matters, resting upon all the scholastic analyses of Shakespeare's grammar school or his sources, while it raises those modern epistemological doubts that have clustered around source, influence, individual authorship, and the ownership of language.

We have no personal information about Shakespeare's education and therefore no direct sense of the texts he studied as a child. It is, however, reasonable to assume that he attended the King's New School in Stratford-upon-Avon; and, since there is abundant documentation concerning many primary and grammar schools throughout England at that time, it is not difficult to reconstruct both a list of texts and a sense of educational techniques. Pupils began with their ABC's and early on worked to master English by reading religious texts like simple catechisms and the Psalms. As early as the age of six or seven, 'grammar school' would begin, which, of course, meant Latin grammar.

Here we can postulate a plausible book-list for the Stratford boy. William Lily's Latin Grammar, first compiled near the beginning of the sixteenth century and still in use two hundred and fifty years later, was the universal foundation. The first part, written in English and known as the *Shorte Introduction* (or, more colloquially, the *Accidence*), took the student through the rudiments of grammar and inflection. In the second part, called the *Brevissima Institutio*, instruction was itself in Latin, covering morphology, syntax, figures of speech, and prosody. During these same early grades pupils were being put through texts of simple maxims in readily construable Latin. The *Sententiae pueriles* of Leonhardus Culmannus, which first appeared in the 1540s, consisted of a graded sequence of truisms, beginning with two words, then progressing to three, and so on. Of even wider usage was the *Disticha moralia* ascribed to Cato; here, too, the emphasis is on enduring verities appropriate to schoolboys, including exhortations to assiduousness, sexual morality, heroism, and acceptance of death. Similar again, both for its aphoristic quality and for its anthology form, was the notably influential Latin version of Æsop's *Fables*, also read in the first years of instruction.

The next phase of Latin readings included another classical-style compendium, the *Zodiacus Vitae* of Palingenio (written c. 1528, also popular in its

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English translation by Barnabe Googe, first published in the 1560s), a twelve-book poetic farrago full of proverbial lore but including some substantial materials from antique culture relating to astronomy, metaphysics, and natural philosophy. Also at this time the schoolboy Shakespeare would have been presented with the first instances of what we would recognize as literature. Not that they are necessarily the most auspicious names. The first, Terence, formed one of the bases for Latin instruction all over Europe because his dialogue was thought to give the fullest impression of the way classical Latin was actually spoken; but lest we picture the infant proto-playwright mapping out his career as he construes the *Eunuch*, it should be pointed out that there is small trace of Terence in Shakespeare and far more of Plautus, who was decidedly less popular in the schools. The other threshold literary figure was Battista Spagnuoli (1447–1513), author of a set of eclogues entitled the *Bucolica*. The vast popularity of Mantuan, as he was always called, remains a historical mystery: whatever the reason, for the later Renaissance he was the supreme master of the bucolic mode, heir to his countryman Virgil (and sometimes thought to be superior to him), the official first teacher of poetics and cradle of pastoralism.

All this was generally mastered by the age of twelve: small Latin indeed. In the Upper School, the reading list covered most of the canonical Latin corpus. Some of these authors, like Ovid, will count for more in Shakespeare's works than they did in the curricula; others, like Virgil, less. For the most part, however, the allusiveness of Shakespeare's language (and of the culture in which he lived) is so universal that it is difficult to superimpose school reading upon playwriting with precision. Poets such as Horace, Juvenal, and Persius certainly stuck in the dramatist's mind, though they hardly seem to be foundational; the same could be said of the leading prose writers in the curriculum, such as Sallust and Cæsar. Indeed, Shakespeare's relation to the high literary canon in Latin seems so personal, so different from a replication of assigned reading, that we might suppose him a dropout somewhere in his early teen years.

But that would be a mistake, given a quite different subset of schoolboy classical readings. To us the above great names represent the inevitable summit of ancient Latinity. But in an early modern education such as Shakespeare's, the progression is not from language to literature but from grammar to rhetoric. Thus the real focus of reading in the middle and upper school years – and here Shakespeare's studious familiarity is beyond dispute – is on that body of texts devoted to oratory. The foundational work is the *Ad Herennium*, then attributed to Cicero, which offered a complete structural account of diction, speech, argument, and style. In combination with the *Topics* of Cicero (an authentic work) and, for the upper forms, the *Institutio oratoriae* of Quintilian, this body of school texts not only introduced pupils to the advanced study of language but also formed the basis for all the study of logic that found its origins in Aristotle and its dissemination in every facet of intellectual and public life. Any account of law or medicine, of political theory or natural history, of ethics or metaphysics –

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steps in this direction were oral, even dramatic: pupils and master held question-and-answer conversations in Latin. But soon reading and writing are closely intertwined. At the most basic level, they strung together *sententiae* into 'themes', thus moving out from the proverbial lore of their reading into slightly more expanded sententiousness. With the more advanced readings, like the *Ad Herennium* or Ovid's *Heroides*, they began to compose epistles in prose or verse; finally they were expected to produce full-blown orations. All these educational processes consist of creative composition emerging from a set of readings that are at once theoretical and exemplary, offering both precept and prototype. Here the work depended on post-classical workbooks emerging out of Cicero and Quintilian, including the *Epitome* of Susenbrotus and the *Progymnasmata* of Aphthonius. More than their loftier predecessors, these texts were used interactively: they directed pupils essentially to place themselves in hypothetical or imaginative situations, sometimes historical, sometimes mythological, and to create their own Latin text. The resulting exercises were inevitably full of tropes, self-conscious about their status as discourse, and – most important of all – they amounted to dramatic impersonations. So, to descend to a perhaps simplistic historical comparison, while we have for decades taught college students to express their own selves and are rewarded with a fundamentally solipsistic public discourse, Renaissance education taught its upper grammar school students to impersonate other voices, and they were rewarded with a flowering of public oratory and theatre.

Finally, there is one other major author – the only modern – whose influence shaped the process of an English sixteenth-century education. In a series of texts on education, including the *Institutio hominis Christiani*, the *De ratione studii*, and the *Institutio principis Christiani*, and in a set of close personal relations with John Colet, Dean of St Paul's, Erasmus had laid out nearly all the principles of modern education. It is Erasmus who gives official status to the logical line that goes back towards Cicero and Aristotle and forward towards Descartes – that is, a set of stable and coordinated relations between truth and language. It is Erasmus who establishes the canon of classical authors suitable for instruction, and it is he who enforces the heuristic and moral value of the *sententia* in reading-matter (it was his edition of Cato that was widely used in school), while also relegating purely sententious, often spuriously classical, works to a secondary position in favour of a moralistic literary criticism applied to major writers. It is Erasmus who shows the way to students, both in his *De conscribendis epistolis* and in his *Colloquies*, in the first demonstrating how to place letter-writing in a dramatic context and in the second offering the fullest modern example of humanistic discussion in multiple voices written in fine classical Latin. Then, at the highpoint of grammar-school education, came his famous *De Copia*, which offered both precept and example in the composition of language that was elegant, highly figured, and capable of almost infinite variation. Whether Shakespeare read Erasmus or not, he certainly had an Erasmian education.

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William fails at the Cicero–Ascham translation method, i.e. Latin to English and back to Latin.

Love's Labour's Lost is above all Shakespeare's monument to the problems of grammar and rhetoric; there is hardly a scene that does not contain exercises in semantics or translation or else larger theories of language. Critical to the whole enterprise is the trio of (pseudo-) learned characters: Don Armado, the new-style wit; Nathaniel, the half-educated priest; and, of special interest here, Holofernes the classically trained schoolmaster. More pedant than pedagogue, Holofernes speaks in a perpetual construing from Latin to English; he cites numerous schoolbook *sententiae*; he quotes and comments on Mantuan as well as Ovid; he lords it over his fellow-'scholars'; he offers time-honoured and conservative views on English orthography.

Just how deeply these forms of reading and learning penetrated Shakespeare's invention may be observed most fully in a scene where no actual schoolmaster appears. It is an exchange between Touchstone and William in *As You Like It*:

Touchstone. . . . Is thy name William?
William. William, sir.
Touchstone. A fair name. Wast born i' th' forest here?
William. Ay, sir, I thank God.
Touchstone. Thank God – a good answer . . . You do love this maid?
William. I do, sir.
Touchstone. Give me your hand. Art thou learned?
William. No, sir.
Touchstone. Then learn this of me: to have is to have. For it is a figure in rhetoric that drink, being poured out of a cup into a glass, by filling the one doth empty the other. For all your writers do consent that *ipse* is he. Now you are not *ipse*, for I am he.
William. Which he, sir?
Touchstone. He, sir, that must marry this woman. Therefore, you clown, abandon – which is in the vulgar, leave – the society – which in the boorish is company – of this female – which in the common is woman; which together is, abandon the society of this female, or, clown, thou perishest; or, to thy better understanding, diest; or, to wit, I kill thee, make thee away, translate thy life into death, thy liberty into bondage. I will deal in poison with thee, or in bastinado, or in steel. I will bandy with thee in faction, I will o'errun thee with policy; I will kill thee a hundred and fifty ways. (5.1.19–52)

The learned fool treats his hapless interlocutor to an almost complete performance of the grammar-school education that an Arden rustic cannot have experienced for real. First, catechism; then, the central proposition of dialectic, which lies at the heart of the relations among grammar, rhetoric, and logic, transmitted in terms of 'ipse' and 'cups' via Cicero and Quintilian[2]; then, the practice of construing from one language to another, in this case, from Lofty to Bumpkin;

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finally, as a graduation exercise, an invention in the spirit of Erasmus' *De copia*, except that where the original merely offered multiple ways of *saying* something (specifically, 'Thank you for your letter'), Touchstone's diverse formulations provide multiple ways of *doing* something, i.e. murdering William by elegant variation.

Whether the grammar-school curriculum surfaces in the voice of the pedant or the parodist, it tells us something. For one thing, these textual materials nearly always betray an awareness that people speak many languages: Evans's instruction in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is confusing less because of the Latin than because he is rendering both languages via Welsh; Touchstone affects to accommodate the language of the country; and the would-be lovers in *The Taming of the Shrew* are attempting to invent private languages. Further, all these appearances of early curricula delineate a world that is inescapably alternative to that of real (i.e. theatrical, or lived) experience. The texts of grammar, rhetoric, and literature, when rendered *as* texts, are in a profound sense bracketed – as are, of course, the characters who import them. Brilliant or foolish, these individuals speak of that which is external, unlived, or, at best, exemplary rather than real; and even when the characters are not marginal, like Hamlet when he appears to be citing Juvenal ('the satirical slave says here that old men have grey beards . . .' (2.2.196–7)), their reading forms part of a textual alternative to actual experience.

Still, if the real issue is how such reading might be assimilated, it is best to understand Holofernes and Touchstone as polar opposites. The schoolmaster, it must be remembered, has great ambitions as a poet, producing, first, a laboured alliterative epigram on the hunting of the deer and then the (blessedly) fragmented pageant of the Worthies. Like his own creator, in other words, he travels the distance between old reading and new writing. Just how catastrophic this travel may be is demonstrated by his own literary criticism of one of the play's competing poets, the sonneteering Biron:

> for the elegancy, facility, and golden cadence of poesy – *caret* [i.e. is lacking]. Ovidius Naso was the man. And why, indeed 'Naso' but for smelling out the odoriferous flowers of fancy, the jerks of invention? *Imitari* is nothing. So doth the hound his master, the ape his keeper, the tired horse his rider. (4.2.114–18)

The irony is, of course, that Holofernes imagines himself to be on the side of invention over imitation when his poetry is agonizingly, almost regurgitatingly, derivative from the books that he inculcates and the pedantic languages that he speaks. The further irony is that true invention can emerge only from a properly understood practice of imitation. Young William Page may move pointlessly from *lapis* to *stone* and back to *lapis*. But that same system of instruction also allows for the alien, bracketed, frequently ancient, and always garbled prior text to become one's own voice, indeed, to define what that voice is. Such an

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achievement – the pun must be forgiven, since it is Shakespeare's – is the touchstone of the real poet.

A man is sitting in London around 1600 in the middle of a personal library whose catalogue corresponds precisely to the 'Sources of Shakespeare's Plays': what can we say about his reading taste? Voracious; more middle-brow than high-brow; heterodox; philosophically not of the avant-garde; anglo-centric in certain ways, generally having to do with past and present public institutions, yet at the same time revealing a considerable fondness for continental story-telling. He is something of a history buff – in that field, his holdings range from the learned to the ephemeral. Theatre, represented a bit sparsely by comparison, is both classic and contemporary, with a sprinkling of university closet drama. There is a certain taste for current events, especially at the level of political intrigue and life-styles of the rich and famous: these are often to be found in the pamphlet collection. As for high-brow literature, you are more likely to find a few well-thumbed volumes than a complete catalogue of the major works.

But let us name the names. As for the serious favourites, Ovid and Plutarch are visible everywhere, and Seneca is only a little less prominent. For classical history, apart from Plutarch, Livy was most often studied, but it is noteworthy that the real source may have been the *Epitome* of Livy written by Florus in the second century AD. Other historians seem to have been consulted only for specific projects: Scotland, Denmark, and Turkey (this last for *Othello*) occasioned specialized research, while *Julius Cæsar* appears to have required a lot of supplementary reading, including Tacitus, Appian, and perhaps Sallust and Suetonius.

Among Shakespeare's sources in his own language, the largest share belongs to the chroniclers who furnished material for the history plays. The compendia that he read most exhaustively were Edward Hall's *Union of the two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and Yorke* (1548), the *Chronicles* of Raphael Holinshed (1578, 1587), and John Stow's *Chronicles of England* (1580) and *Annales of England* (1592). Together, these offered the dramatist not only the raw data, both dynastic and anecdotal, but also the methodologies of history-writing and the special politics of the Tudor ascendancy. Of a different kind, but persistently influential, are such literary works as the didactic *Mirror for Magistrates* (1559) and Samuel Daniel's poetic *First Fowre Bookes of the Civile Wars* (1595), while yet another approach to the materials comes from the strenuous polemics for the Protestant cause offered by John Foxe in his *Acts and Monuments*, known as the *Booke of Martyrs* (first published in English, 1563). Figures of exceptional cultural fascination, including King John, Richard III, Henry V, and Falstaff had generated their own specialized source materials.

On what we would consider the more literary side, Shakespeare's English-language reading list tended to be similar to ours. So far as the fourteenth-century masters are concerned, Chaucer is writ large in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and

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Troilus and Cressida, while John Gower makes his mark both at the very beginning of the dramatist's career (*Comedy of Errors*) and the very end (*Pericles*). The two greatest non-dramatic masterpieces of Shakespeare's own age, Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* and Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, find their way into comic, historic, and tragic works, with *King Lear* embracing elements of both.

Shakespeare's tastes were not exclusively highbrow, however. Among the works of prose fiction, Barnaby Riche's *Apolonius and Silla* (1581), Robert Greene's *Pandosto* (1588), and Thomas Lodge's *Rosalynde* (1590) might be forgotten today were they not the principal sources for *Twelfth Night*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *As You Like It*, but they prove to be lively works in their own right that vindicate Shakespeare's dependence on them. John Lyly's *Euphues* (1579), whose mix of wit and eros and pedantry swept through Elizabethan literate culture, can be detected in the language of every overwrought lover in the comedies. So far as theatrical literature is concerned, Shakespeare's tastes are decidedly popular. While Marlowe and Jonson exercise some influence, it appears that Anon. is virtually his favourite dramatist, as witness his careful reading of *The Troublesome Reign of King John* (1591), or the complex ways in which *The Rare Triumphes of Love and Fortune* (1589) and *Mucedorus* (first version, 1598) are woven into the plots of the late romances.

Lists of titles like these need to be grounded in a larger sense of the contemporary intellectual climate, particularly as regards book-making and book-reading. At the level of European culture in general, two factors must not be forgotten: first, the continental Renaissance, now more than a century old, had stimulated an enormous opening-up in the category of literature, both that which was revived from the past and that which was being newly produced; second, the invention and growth of printing continued to disseminate the material objects of reading in greater quantity and to a wider audience. England, besides feeling these effects, was by the later sixteenth century in the grip of a quite self-conscious drive to found and promote a national – or even nationalist – literary culture, the evidence of which is not only such highly visible careers as those of, say, Spenser and Ralegh, but also a flood of literary rivalries and disputes which generated a great deal of ink and rendered book-making itself a matter of public interest. Indeed, these sometimes became the actual stuff of drama, as is clear from the frequent appearance of names like Gabriel Harvey, Thomas Nashe, Robert Greene, and George Chapman in the explanatory notes to Elizabethan playtexts.

Two other matters bear even more directly on Shakespeare's sources as a body of text. From the 1560s onwards, a gigantic industry of translation revolutionizes what it is possible for the English to read. Though the dramatist's familiarity with passages in the original is often demonstrable, Shakespeare's plays would scarcely have been possible without: Hoby's Castiglione (1561), Adlington's Apuleius (1566), Golding's Ovid (1567), North's Plutarch (1579), Harington's

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appear to be 'literature lite', they also remind us that some of Shakespeare's most prestigious source books, including the *Metamorphoses* and Plutarch's *Lives*, are themselves structured in the form of composite and detachable parts that invite comparison.

Now, having listed all these points of origin, ancient and modern, lofty and popular, we must ask the slightly ingenuous question, did Shakespeare really *read* his sources? As I have suggested earlier, it is clear enough that he read his school-texts quite independently of instrumentalizing them for some new piece of writing. It is also clear that there is a body of important works of such universal presence within early modern civilization – one might borrow Foucault's designation of 'transdiscursive', by which he refers to Marx and Freud – that they are present everywhere in the formation of the plays via some deep acculturation. One can hardly imagine, for instance, the erotic ideals of the Sonnets without Plato, or the politics of Milan and Naples in *The Tempest* without Machiavelli, or the transports of love, whether straight or parodied, from *Love's Labour's Lost* to *Antony and Cleopatra*, without Petrarch. Likewise, without the Bible we could not begin to account for turns of phrase like Hamlet's 'There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow' (5.2.157–8), or Bottom's 'The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen . . .' (*Dream* 4.1.204–5), or, indeed, the very title *Measure for Measure*, with its multiple reverberations from the Sermon on the Mount. All of these books, in whatever form and by whatever necessary intermediaries – he *read*.

But centuries of source study, applying itself to Bandello, or the anonymous playtexts, or even the canonical classics which form the basis of the dramatic plots, have suggested that Shakespeare did not so much read these works as cut and paste them – that is, he opportunistically stole what he needed, ignored the rest, and sublimed everything. These assumptions are well worth questioning. To put the matter in its simplest terms, authors generally can discover something in another book only once they have read that book independently of its precise future usefulness. Shakespeare, in other words, might have consulted Richard Knolles's *Generall Historie of the Turkes* when he had already worked out the circumstances of *Othello*, but he is less likely to have dreamed up a tale about a Moor marrying a Venetian lady and then gone to a first reading of Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*, 3.7, either accidentally or in the foreknowledge that he would find what he needed there. And by whatever chronology of consultation, exported material remains touched with its own original context. The source book, whether it is *The Faerie Queene* or *The Three Ladies of London*, enters a complicated calculus of inspiration for any author under its influence.

These abstract principles become concrete when we follow some quite specific paths of Shakespearian sourcing. In a set of interesting articles, Martin Mueller has shown how certain stories, while providing the main point of origin for a single play, also haunt the dramatist's imagination repeatedly and throughout his career. Bandello's tale of Fenicia and Timbreo includes all the main events of the

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larger structures derived from a classical education or the plots derived from pre-existing narratives is to neglect the independent power of the word. This is not the place to rehearse all the by now familiar arguments from structuralism and post-structuralism concerning the 'death of the author'. Suffice it to say that both the structures of language and, more to the point, all the ambient vocabularies at a given historical or cultural moment contribute to the composition of any piece of writing as much as do the consciously manipulated materials traditionally classed as intellectual underpinnings or sources.

This kind of reading, for which Roland Barthes's felicitous term is the *déjà lu*, concerns us not just out of universal theoretical correctness but because Shakespeare proves to have been a kind of language sponge, a picker-up of specialized lexicons from every conceivable stratum of his society. In this field it would be impossible to give a full account of Shakespeare's library, or indeed of all the sequences of imagery and allusion in the plays that testify to his skills at absorption. Perhaps the clearest index to this phenomenon is the response of scholars who have attempted to account for this verbal adeptness by imagining a Shakespeare who was not so much a linguistic polymath as a real practising multi-professional. Shakespeare has been, over the centuries, a lawyer, a doctor, a thief, a theologian, a Catholic, a Protestant, a duellist, a military man, a falconer, a keeper of hounds – all because he had mastered their respective languages.

Let us permit one quite respectable instance to stand for this kind of argument in general. A. F. Falconer argues that the opening scene of *The Tempest* is in every detail nautically correct. Expressions like 'take in the topsail' and 'lay her a-hold' do not represent mere colourful sea-talk but the perfectly phrased set of orders designed to save the ship under the given conditions of wind, shore, and ocean. From which Falconer concludes that Shakespeare 'could not have come by this knowledge from books'.[4] That may be true: there is no surviving sixteenth-century text in which all of these locutions are neatly laid out, and it is possible that the man who lived his whole life many days' arduous travel from the sea had managed to do some apprentice work aboard a sailing vessel, preferably among tars who had colourful tales to tell of the Bermuda triangle. But it is more likely – and the same would go for many other first-hand vocabularies – that Shakespeare derived this knowledge from a combination of reading, listening, and loving the play of language.

Perhaps it is Shakespeare's own fascination with books – or some attempt to exorcise that fascination – that turns so many of his characters into readers. Most of the time when book-learning enters the dramatic scene, as the example of *Love's Labour's Lost* has already suggested, it is in opposition to real experience. Love in particular seems to keep little company with reading. Some amorous bookmen are hopeless: Slender reveals his ineptitude as a lover by regretting that he has not brought Tottel's *Miscellany* to help him woo Anne Page (*Merry Wives* 1.1.165); nor do we entertain higher hopes for Malvolio's prospects with Olivia when he determines to 'read politic authors' (*Twelfth Night* 2.5.141). But when

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Juliet tells Romeo that he kisses by the book (1.5.107), or when Rosalind-Ganymede reports on an uncle who read out lectures against love (*As You Like It* 3.2.312), or when Lysander reports the lesson of all those tales and histories that 'The course of true love never did run smooth' (*Dream* 1.1.134), the place of reading appears more complicated. It is not so much a contradiction of experience as a necessary first step along the way.

And that dynamic points finally to Shakespeare's two greatest dramatic scenes of reading, one from the beginning of his career, the other from the end. The raped, mutilated, and silenced Lavinia of *Titus Andronicus*, in an attempt to reveal the horrors of her own experience, can do nothing but point to a book in which the story of Tereus, Procne, and Philomela has pre-written the miserable sequence of events. The precision of the parallel – although Shakespeare's version is more horrific – enables both the characters and the audience to read experience as though it were a book and read the book as though it were experience. Prospero's book, which he prizes above his dukedom, is both the sign and the substance of his magical power. When, at the end of the play, he drowns it 'deeper than did ever plummet sound' (*Tempest* 5.1.56), he and all those who have survived the shipwreck are returned to Europe, to politics, to life, death, and marriage – in short, to the fullness of natural experience. Lavinia's volume is quite explicitly Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and while Prospero's is less directly identifiable, it is signalled by an incantation that comes almost verbatim from the same work. When Shakespeare's characters have their fullest experience of reading, they turn to Shakespeare's favourite source.

Notes

1. Citation is to *Ben Jonson*, ed. Ian Donaldson (Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 454.
2. See T. W. Baldwin, *William Shakspere's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1944), II, 116–20.
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call *conversion*. Present usage affords numerous examples of the most common kind of conversion, from noun to verb, but the dictionary prevents us from converting *any* noun to a verb. We can say that we were 'fathered', but we cannot say, as Edgar can in comparing his own state to Lear's, 'He childed as I fathered' (*Lear* 3.6.103). Shakespeare was free to convert any noun to a verb, imparting to the verb the semantic specificity normally limited to nouns. Caliban grumbles, 'you *sty* me / In this hard rock' (*Tempest* 1.2.345–6); Coriolanus resolves to ingratiate himself to the plebs, 'I'll *mountebank* their loves' (*Coriolanus* 3.2.132), and Timon curses fellow man, 'Destruction *fang* mankind' (*Timon* 4.3.23). Less frequently, conversion takes place between other parts of speech. Nouns and verbs can both change to adjectives. Examples of the former include the '*pelican* daughters' cursed by Lear (*Lear* 3.4.72), the '*salt* imagination' discovered in Angelo (*Measure* 5.1.393); an example of the latter appears in Macbeth's attempt to inure his '*initiate* fear' (*Macbeth* 3.4.142). Conversely, adjectives can function as both nouns and verbs: Cleopatra dreads being displayed in captivity before 'poor'st *diminutives*' (*Antony* 4.13.37); Roderigo, says Cassio, was instructed to '*Brave* me upon the watch' (*Othello* 5.2.335).

Before standardization, parts of speech had more freedom to shift their grammatical position as well as function. Not infrequently the common word order of subject/verb/object is inverted. The verb often precedes the subject – 'Met I my father' (*Lear* 5.3.188); the object often precedes the verb, 'I such a fellow saw' (4.1.33); and sentences containing both types of inversion are not uncommon: 'That handkerchief / Did an Egyptian to my mother give' (*Othello* 3.4.53–4). In a number of remarkable periodic sentences, the verb is withheld until the very end of the sentence. The delay can be racking, as when Edgar draws out tension leading to his father's death,

> But his flawed heart –
> Alack, too weak the conflict to support! –
> 'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief,
> Burst smilingly. (*Lear* 5.3.195–8)

It can also shock, as when Othello punctuates his sentence and his life with the same 'O bloody period!' (*Othello* 5.2.366). Modifiers – adjectives, adverbs, participial phrases – need not be placed close to what they modify. Sometimes the subject they modify is not stated at all. When the ghost reports to Hamlet, ''Tis given out that, *sleeping in mine orchard* / A serpent stung me' (*Hamlet* 1.5.35–6), we would fault his use of a dangling participle in the italicized phrase: no subject is present for the adjectival phrase to modify. Primary verbs are often distant from their auxiliaries, as in the Duke's recommendation of words over violence, 'Your gentleness *shall* force / More than your force *move* us to gentleness' (*As You Like It* 2.7.101–2). Because there were fewer prepositions and conjunctions, and less subordination and co-ordination, the relation of clauses to one another is not always clear. For example, in Gratiano's ironic sneer, 'The Hebrew will

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acters to create shifts of sympathy which bring in train difficult questions of judgement.

Speech in *Venus and Adonis* runs the gamut from bickering to desolate lament, and its distribution between protagonists crucially shapes the reader's responses. We find it hard to empathize with Adonis, for instance, during the dozens of opening stanzas in which he is denied significant utterance. When he attempts to speak, Venus stops his lips (46–7), and his words are suppressed by the narrator as well as by the goddess of love: 'He saith she is immodest, blames her miss; / What follows more she murders with a kiss' (53–4; cf. 47–8). It's true that his initial burst of direct speech, one hundred and thirty lines later, sounds abruptly petulant: 'And now Adonis, with a lazy sprite . . . cries, "Fie, no more of love! / The sun doth burn my face; I must remove"' (181–6). But his eloquence proves formidable in his defences of chastity (523–36, 769–810), where he points out his 'unripe years', and complains that Venus stands for 'sweating lust' not love. These speeches are unlikely to persuade readers that Venus is simply wrong to argue for pleasure and procreation, but they balance the poem by introducing elements of a debate structure.

The heroine of *The Rape of Lucrece* is even slower to be heard. When Tarquin, arriving at Collatine's mansion, 'stories to her ears her husband's fame' (106), she responds with the taciturnity of an ideal Elizabethan wife: 'Her joy with heaved-up hand she doth express, / And wordless so greets heaven for his success' (111–12). Arguments against the rape are initially put by the rapist, not by Lucrece (190–280), and when he enters her chamber, her voice is not directly heard ('she with vehement prayers urgeth still / Under what colour he commits this ill' (475–6)). Only after Tarquin has threatened that, if she resists him, he will murder a slave and put his corpse in bed next to her, then tell the world that he found them together, does Lucrece break into direct speech; and even then her protests and pleas are prefaced by an account of how imperfectly she articulates:

> She puts the period often from his place,
> And midst the sentence so her accent breaks
> That twice she doth begin ere once she speaks. (565–7)

Once she warms up, however, Lucrece proves so relentlessly eloquent that her assailant is moved to silence her by wrapping her mouth in the bedclothes. Elizabethan readers had an appetite for lengthy laments, but the complaint against Time and Opportunity which Lucrece utters on Tarquin's departure is by any measure remarkable. Roused by the dawn chorus, she then calls upon Philomel – who was (according to Ovid) transformed into a nightingale after her rape by Tereus – to join her in a duet of grief. The onward sweep of her plaint, which continues for hundreds of lines, is sustained by Shakespeare's resourceful management of rhyme. In *Venus and Adonis* he had combined melodiousness with epigrammatic point by using a rhyme-scheme that moved smoothly from a quatrain into a couplet: *ababcc*. The additional rhyme in the *Lucrece* stanza

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