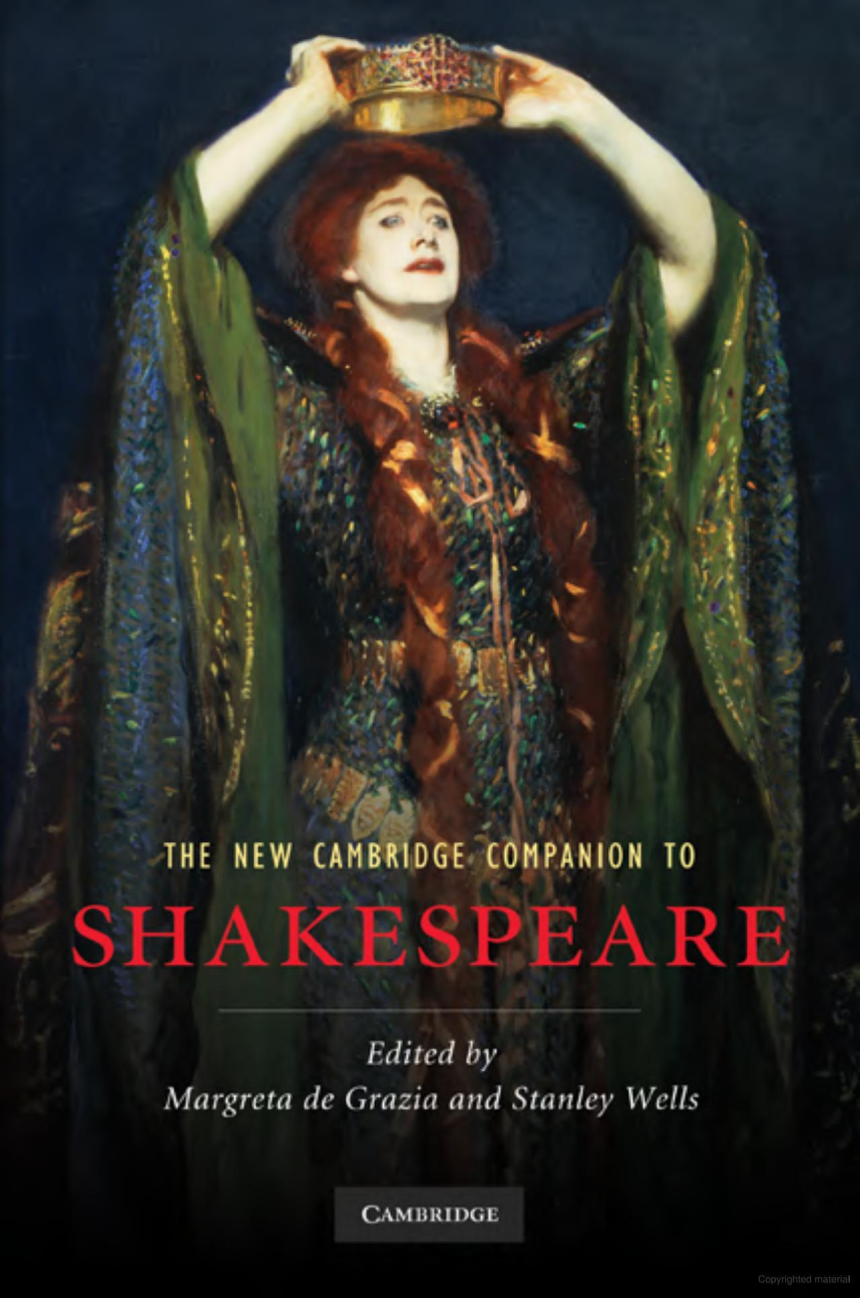

THE NEW CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO SHAKESPEARE

Edited by
Margreta de Grazia and Stanley Wells

CAMBRIDGE

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: A PARTIAL CHRONOLOGY

Dates of composition below do not in all cases correspond with dates of publication given in individual chapters.

26 April 1564	baptized in Stratford-upon-Avon
28 November 1582	marriage licence issued for William Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway
26 May 1583	baptism of Susanna, their daughter
2 February 1585	baptism of Hamnet and Judith, their twin son and daughter
1592	Robert Greene refers to Shakespeare as an 'upstart crow'
1593	publication of *Venus and Adonis*
1594	publication of *The Rape of Lucrece*
15 March 1595	Shakespeare named as joint payee of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, founded in 1594
11 August 1596	burial of Hamnet Shakespeare in Stratford-upon-Avon
October 1596	draft of the grants of arms to John, Shakespeare's father
4 May 1597	Shakespeare buys New Place, Stratford-upon-Avon
1598	Shakespeare listed as one of the 'principal comedians' in Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour*
1598	mention of Shakespeare in Francis Meres' *Palladis Tamia*
1599	building of the Globe
8 September 1601	burial of John Shakespeare in Stratford-upon-Avon
2 February 1602	John Manningham notes performance of *Twelfth Night* at the Middle Temple
1 May 1602	Shakespeare pays £320 for land in Old Stratford

1603	Shakespeare named among the 'principal tragedians' in Jonson's *Sejanus*
May 1603	Shakespeare named in documents conferring the title of the King's Men on their company
24 July 1605	Shakespeare pays £440 for an interest on the tithes in Stratford
5 June 1607	Susanna Shakespeare marries John Hall
1608	the King's Men take over the indoor Blackfriars theatre
9 September 1608	burial of Mary, Shakespeare's mother, in Stratford
1609	publication of the Sonnets
1612	Shakespeare testifies in the Belott–Mountjoy case
10 March 1613	Shakespeare buys the Blackfriars Gatehouse
1613	Globe burns down during a performance of *All is True* (*Henry VIII*)
September 1614	Shakespeare involved in enclosure disputes in Stratford
10 February 1616	Judith Shakespeare marries Thomas Quiney
25 March 1616	Shakespeare's will drawn up in Stratford
25 April 1616	Shakespeare buried in Stratford (the monument records that he died on 23 April)
8 August 1623	burial of Anne Shakespeare in Stratford
1623	publication of the First Folio
16 July 1649	burial of Susanna Hall in Stratford
9 February 1662	burial of Judith Quiney in Stratford
1670	death of Shakespeare's last direct descendant, his grand-daughter Elizabeth, who married Thomas Nash in 1626 and John (later Sir John) Bernard in 1649

A CONJECTURAL CHRONOLOGY OF SHAKESPEARE'S WORKS

It is particularly difficult to establish the dates of composition and the relative chronology of the early works, up to those named by Francis Meres in his *Palladis Tamia* of 1598. The following table is based on the 'Canon and Chronology' section in *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion*, by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, with John Jowett and William Montgomery (1987), where more detailed information and discussion may be found.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona	1590–1
The Taming of the Shrew	1590–1
The First Part of the Contention (*2 Henry VI*)	1591
Richard Duke of York (*3 Henry VI*)	1591
1 Henry VI	1592
Titus Andronicus	1592
Richard III	1592–3
Venus and Adonis	1592–3
The Rape of Lucrece	1593–4
The Comedy of Errors	1594
Love's Labour's Lost	1594–5
Richard II	1595
Romeo and Juliet	1595
A Midsummer Night's Dream	1595
King John	1596
The Merchant of Venice	1596–7
1 Henry IV	1596–7
The Merry Wives of Windsor	1597–8
2 Henry IV	1597–8
Much Ado About Nothing	1598
Henry V	1598–9
Julius Caesar	1599
As You Like It	1599–1600

Hamlet	1600–1
Twelfth Night	1600–1
Troilus and Cressida	1602
The Sonnets	1593–1603
Measure for Measure	1603
A Lover's Complaint	1603–4
Sir Thomas More	1603–4
Othello	1603–4
All's Well that Ends Well	1604–5
Timon of Athens	1605
King Lear	1605–6
Macbeth	1606
Antony and Cleopatra	1606
Pericles	1607
Coriolanus	1608
The Winter's Tale	1609
Cymbeline	1610
The Tempest	1611
Henry VIII (All is True)	1613
The Two Noble Kinsmen	1613–14

1

STEPHEN GREENBLATT

The traces of Shakespeare's life

What are the key surviving traces, unadorned by local colour, of Shakespeare's life? The core set of these traces, of course, consists of the printing of his name as the author of his plays and poems. During his lifetime, eighteen of the plays now attributed to Shakespeare were printed in the small-format editions called quartos. Many such editions of plays in this period were issued without the name of the author – there was no equivalent to our copyright system, and publishers were under no legal obligation to specify on their title pages who wrote the texts they printed. (See Chapter 5.) By the second decade of the seventeenth century, it had become more or less routine to include the author's name, but it remains difficult at this distance to gauge the level of contemporary interest in particular playwrights: some contemporaries compiled detailed lists of the names of those they regarded as the pre-eminent playwrights in different genres; many others, to judge from surviving texts, seem to have been no more interested in the authors of plays than audiences today are interested in the authors of television shows. (See Chapter 3.) Only occasionally were there significant exceptions, and then as now for the same principal motive: profit. By 1597 seven of Shakespeare's plays had been printed, their title pages providing details of plot and of performance but not the identity of the author. After 1598 Shakespeare's name, spelled in various ways, began to appear on the title page of quartos, and indeed several plays almost certainly not authored by him were printed with his name. His name – Shakespeare, Shake-speare, Shakspeare, Shaxberd, Shakespere, and the like – had evidently begun to sell plays. During his lifetime more published plays were attributed to Shakespeare than to any other contemporary dramatist.

Similarly, Shakespeare's name figured prominently in the editions, published in his lifetime, of his non-dramatic works: *Venus and Adonis* (1593), *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594) and the Sonnets (1609). Confirmation of Shakespeare's contemporary reputation as a love poet comes from many early sources, including those students in St John's College, Cambridge, who


image
not
available

friend, but Sidney was a dashing aristocrat, linked by birth and marriage to the great families of the realm, and he died tragically of a wound he received on the battlefield. Writers of a less exalted station did not excite the same interest, unless, like Ben Jonson, they were celebrated for their public persona, or, like another of Shakespeare's contemporaries, Christopher Marlowe, they ran afoul of the authorities.[2] The fact that there are no police reports, privy council orders, indictments or post-mortem inquests about Shakespeare, as there are about Marlowe, tells us something significant about Shakespeare's life – he possessed a gift for staying out of trouble – but it is not the kind of detail on which biographers thrive.

Centuries of archival labour have unearthed at least some of the basic details. William Shakespeare was baptized in Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon on 26 April 1564. (Since christenings usually took place within five days of a child's birth, his actual date of birth – for which there is no record – is conventionally celebrated on 23 April.) He was the first son of John and Mary Shakespeare; two daughters had already been born to them, but neither had survived infancy. Altogether they would have eight children, four daughters and four sons. William's sister Anne, born when he was 7 years old, died in 1579, just before William's fifteenth birthday. Another sister, Joan, married a hatter and survived both her husband and her celebrated brother; she is mentioned in Shakespeare's will. William and Joan were the only ones of the siblings to marry. One of Shakespeare's younger brothers, Richard, left no trace of his occupation; another, Gilbert, is said to have been a Stratford haberdasher; and the third, Edmund, became a professional actor, though evidently not a notable one. Edmund, who died at 28 in 1607, was given an expensive funeral, presumably paid for by his older brother, whose tremendous success in the theatre had by that time made him a wealthy man.

The place into which William was born was a prosperous, pleasant market town, situated on the River Avon, about 100 miles north-west of London. It was not the fiefdom of a powerful nobleman or of the church; since the mid-sixteenth century it had been an independent township, governed by an elected bailiff and a council of burgesses and aldermen. The town was graced with substantial half-timbered houses lining the three main streets running parallel to the river, a fine church with a noteworthy chapel, a bustling annual fair and – perhaps most important for our purposes – an excellent free grammar school. The origins of William's father, John, were in the countryside; his grandfather, Richard, was a tenant farmer in the nearby village of Snitterfield, where he rented a house and land from Robert Arden, a prosperous, land-owning farmer. In the mid-sixteenth century John Shakespeare moved to Stratford, where he became a glover and dresser of soft leather. He

must have done reasonably well for himself, for he purchased a house and other property in Stratford and soon after married Mary Arden, the youngest daughter and favourite of his father's landlord. Mary was not one of the wealthy heiresses – Portia, Juliet, Celia, Hero and Olivia – who populate Shakespeare's plays, but, bringing both property of her own and a name of some repute, she was a prize for John Shakespeare. Continuing to prosper – in addition to making fashionable gloves, he seems to have bought and sold real estate, dealt in wool and other agricultural commodities, and lent money at high rates of interest – John steadily rose in the town's administrative hierarchy. He held a series of trusted roles culminating in 1568 – when his son William was 4 years old – in a year's term as bailiff, the equivalent of mayor. A sign of his ascent was the application he initiated for a coat of arms, which would have signalled his attaining the rank of a gentleman, someone in the upper 2 per cent of England's population.

But though a coat of arms was drawn up for him, John Shakespeare did not pursue the costly process that would have led to its actual grant. From the late 1560s onwards the course of his life became distinctly less smooth. There were repeated, unexplained failures to attend meetings; legal complaints, lawsuits and fines; the selling of family property to raise cash. When in 1592 the local authorities, attempting to ferret out Catholic sympathizers, drew up a list of those who had not been coming monthly to the Protestant church services, as the law required, John Shakespeare's name was included. Speculation that Shakespeare's father was secretly a Catholic – at a time of intense fear and persecution of Catholics suspected of conspiring to topple the regime – was furthered by the discovery, in the eighteenth century, of a document that purported to be John Shakespeare's 'spiritual last will and testament'. The original document, conspicuously Catholic in its formulations, has been lost, however, and its authenticity has been challenged. Moreover, in the list of those cited for failing to attend church, John Shakespeare's name was placed in a special category, distinct from religious recusancy: 'It was said that these last nine come not to church for fear of process for debt.' John Shakespeare never returned to public office in Stratford, though he seems to have weathered his financial difficulties and remained, until his death in September 1601, in the substantial double house in Henley Street where his celebrated son was born. Shakespeare's mother outlived her husband by seven years.

Part at least of William Shakespeare's childhood and adolescence may well have been shadowed by these family difficulties – how could it not have been? – but there is no firm evidence to prove it. Indeed, after the initial baptismal entry, there is no firm evidence of anything about his upbringing. He presumably learned his ABCs at what Elizabethans called a petty

school and then presumably went on to the King's New School, a fine, free grammar school where he would have received a serious education centred on the Latin classics, but the records that might have confirmed his attendance are lost. (See Chapter 2.) There is no record, likewise, of what he did in the years immediately after he left school. His name is not listed in the well-maintained records of those who matriculated at Oxford or Cambridge University, and, if he had somehow attended anyway, we would almost certainly know it from the title pages of his plays whose authors routinely and conspicuously trumpeted such distinctions. But whether he was an apprentice to his father in the glove business or a law clerk or an unlicensed schoolteacher or a soldier – all frequently rehearsed speculations – is impossible to determine with any certainty.

The next time that William Shakespeare leaves a documentary trace of himself is in the marriage licence bond recorded on 28 November 1582 to enable him to marry Anne Hathaway of Shottery, a village near Stratford. Shakespeare was 18 years old; Anne was 26, the daughter of a modestly prosperous sheep farmer and husbandman, recently deceased. The bond, required to facilitate unusual haste in conducting the marriage, may have been linked to the fact that the bride was some three months pregnant. In May she gave birth to a daughter, christened Susanna. Before two years had passed, she gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl, whom the parents named Hamnet and Judith, after their long-term Stratford friends Hamnet and Judith Sadler. These three children, all of whom survived infancy, are the only recorded offspring of William Shakespeare. Hamnet died in 1596, at the age of 11; Susanna died in her sixty-seventh year, in 1649; and Judith reached what for the time was the ripe old age of 77, dying in 1662. Her three sons all died before she did, and Shakespeare's only grand-daughter, Elizabeth, died childless in 1670.

What role Shakespeare played in the upbringing of his three children is unknown. After the records of their births in 1583 and 1585 we have no direct evidence of his whereabouts or activities for seven years, a period that has been dubbed by frustrated biographers the 'Lost Years'. Then in 1592 a playwright, pamphleteer and fiction writer notorious for his disorderly life, Robert Greene, published a nasty attack on an 'Upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers'. 'Our feathers': Greene's attack takes the form of a warning to fellow university-educated playwrights who had been writing for the London stage. Lacking their elite educational background, the 'Upstart Crow' started off as a mere actor – one of 'those Puppets', as Greene puts it, 'that spake from our mouths, those Antics garnished in our colours' – but has now set up to be a writer as well. He has the gall to think he is 'as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you'; indeed

he imagines himself to be 'an absolute *Iohannes fac totum*', a Johnny-do-all. Greene does not exactly name the rival he thus characterizes as ambitious, unscrupulous and opportunistic, but he unmistakably identifies him by alluding to a line from one of Shakespeare's earliest plays, *3 Henry VI*, and informing us that its author regards himself as 'the onely Shake-scene in a country'.

It is reasonably clear then that by 1592 Shakespeare had made his way from Stratford to London, that he had become an actor and that he had established himself sufficiently as a playwright to excite the anger of an envious contemporary. Indeed Greene seems to assume that Shakespeare was well-enough known to be identified merely by a quotation and an allusion. A few months later the printer of Greene's pamphlet, Henry Chettle, published an apology. Once again, no names are directly mentioned, but referring to the person attacked as an upstart crow, Chettle testifies that he personally has 'seen his demeanour no less civil than he excellent in the quality [i.e. the occupation] he professes'. 'Besides,' he adds, 'diverse of worship' – that is, several important people – 'have reported his uprightness of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his facetious [i.e. witty] grace in writing, which approves his art.'[3] By 1592, then, Shakespeare seems to have had important friends and protectors.

The precise route by which Shakespeare entered the professional theatre – the company he may have first joined as an apprentice, the way he initially received the chance to write for the stage, the precise moment he arrived in London – has remained obscure. Theatre scholars have reconstructed with reasonable confidence his trajectory thereafter, a trajectory that led him to be an actor, playwright and shareholder in the company known first as the Lord Chamberlain's Men and then, after Queen Elizabeth's death in 1603, as the King's Men. These were the two most successful and celebrated companies of the age, and Shakespeare flourished in both reputation and wealth.

He must have worked extraordinarily hard: for the better part of two decades he wrote approximately two plays a year, plays that suggest restless and substantial background reading as well as intense compositional attention. At the same time he was somehow memorizing parts, rehearsing and performing in plays, his own and those of others. He must, at least on some occasions, have also accompanied his company when they travelled from town to town. And he was helping to manage his company's finances and his own, investing his earnings, for the most part, in country real estate in and around Stratford and perhaps lending money from time to time at a favourable rate of return. He was indeed an 'absolute *Iohannes fac totum*', and he reaped the rewards. In a profession where almost everyone else eked out a marginal existence, Shakespeare amassed a small fortune.

Combing the archives, scholars have found various documentary traces of Shakespeare's business dealings. He was twice cited for not paying his taxes on his London residence. In his Stratford house he amassed an ample supply of corn and malt, presumably for sale. He sold a load of stone to the Stratford corporation, which used it to repair a bridge. He bought an interest in a lease of 'tithes of corn, grain, blade, and hay'. A letter from one Stratford burgher to another remarks that 'Our countryman Mr. Shakespeare is willing to disburse some money upon some odd yardland or other at Shottery or near about us.'[4] Another letter, drafted but not sent, asked Shakespeare for a loan of £30; he was evidently understood, then, to dabble in money-lending. At least twice Shakespeare went to court to recover small sums of money that he claimed were owed him. None of these dealings constitutes anything out of the ordinary for a person of means in this period, but, taken together, they represent a lifelong attention to his financial resources.

If we set aside the astonishing genius of what he wrote, this set of activities and accomplishments, though considerable, might not qualify as superhuman, but it would for anyone, however gifted, have required unusual discipline, tenacity and ambition. The seventeenth-century gossip-monger John Aubrey, one of the first writers to interest himself in Shakespeare's life, is not to be trusted. But at least one of the anecdotes he collected and recorded in 1681 rings true: Shakespeare was not, Aubrey was told, 'a company keeper'. He 'wouldn't be debauched', Aubrey's informant reported, and if invited out, he would excuse himself, writing that 'he was in pain'.[5] Shakespeare must have husbanded his time extremely well: it is noteworthy that his two great narrative poems seem to have been written during a period in which the theatres were all shut down, by government order, in response to an epidemic of plague.

When this torrent of London-based activity was going on, the playwright did not live with his family: he took rented lodgings near the theatres, living at various times in St Helen's parish, Bishopsgate, in the Clink in Southwark, across the river, and on Silver Street, not far from St Paul's. How frequently Shakespeare saw his wife and children is not known; Aubrey was told that he visited them once a year. He had not, in any case, abandoned them: his wife and children remained in Stratford, living with his parents in the family house on Henley Street and then, from 1597 onwards, in New Place, the second-largest house in the town. Shakespeare's purchase of New Place is striking evidence of his prosperity, prosperity signified as well by the successful application in 1596 for a family coat of arms. His father, as we noted above, had initiated that application decades earlier, at the height of his prosperity, and then abandoned it; its renewal was almost certainly the work of his startlingly successful son. Certainly the irate York Herald, Peter Brooke, thought

Pericles was a major popular success, and in Shakespeare's career it seems to have initiated the interest in romance that dominated his last works.

Sometime in his later 40s, around 1611, Shakespeare seems to have retired from London and returned to Stratford. The reason for his retirement, at around the time he wrote *The Tempest*, is unclear. He was still busy with affairs: in 1613 he made a very substantial investment in London real estate, purchasing the Blackfriars Gatehouse, near the private playhouse in which his company performed. He busied himself in Stratford life as well, contributing to the bill to repair the highways, entertaining a visiting preacher in his home at New Place and entering into agreements to protect his personal financial interests in a dispute over the enclosure of common lands. He continued to write plays – the lost *Cardenio*, *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* – but now, it seems, from the distance of Stratford and with the collaboration of a younger colleague, John Fletcher.

Shakespeare's older daughter, Susanna, married the physician John Hall in 1607. The couple lived in Stratford and had a daughter, Elizabeth, the next year. Shakespeare's younger daughter, Judith, married Thomas Quiney of Stratford in February 1616. On that occasion, or shortly after, according to a tale recorded in a Stratford vicar's diary some fifty years later, 'Shakespeare, Drayton [that is, Michael Drayton, the poet], and Ben Jonson had a merry meeting, and it seems drank too hard, for Shakespeare died of a fever there contracted.' This tale – like the other stories that belatedly began to circulate about Shakespeare as a deer poacher, or a menial at the door of the theatre or a prompt-boy – must be taken with many grains of salt, but it is at least clear that he became seriously ill at about this time.

In the winter of 1616 Shakespeare summoned his lawyer, Francis Collins, and instructed him to draw up his last will and testament, a document he signed, with a shaky hand, on 25 March 1616. The will leaves virtually everything – the substantial house, the great bulk of its contents and the lands in and around Stratford – to Susanna, who was named executor, along with her husband. A provision was made for Judith, though the will was carefully crafted to keep Judith's husband from having access to the inheritance, and smaller sums were left for his only surviving sibling, Joan, and for several other relations and friends. A modest donation was made to the poor. To his wife of thirty-four years Shakespeare initially left nothing at all. Then, in an addition interlined on the last of the three pages, he added a new provision: 'Item, I give unto my wife my second-best bed with the furniture [i.e. bed furnishings].' Scholars have debated the significance of this addition: some have observed that Shakespeare's wife would have had certain legal rights, independent of the specific terms in the will, and have argued that the second-best bed was often the one that the couple used, the

best bed being reserved for special guests. Others have found the provision, in the absence of any terms of endearment, a deliberate slight.

Shakespeare was buried in the chancel of Holy Trinity Church in Stratford. Carved on the plain slab covering his grave are four lines:

> GOOD FREND FOR JESUS SAKE FORBEARE,
> TO DIGG THE DUST ENCLOASED HEARE.
> BLESTE BE YE MAN YT SPARES THES STONES,
> AND CURST BE HE YT MOVES MY BONES.

In the north wall of the chancel above the grave a monument carved in black-and-white marble depicts Shakespeare with a quill pen in his right hand, a piece of paper under his left. Above the effigy sits the Shakespeare coat of arms, flanked by cherubs, and at the top, presiding over it all, sits a highly realistic carved skull.

In one of the dedicatory poems to the First Folio, seven years after Shakespeare's death, Leonard Digges remarks that when 'Time dissolves thy Stratford monument', here in this book 'we alive shall view thee still'. The sentiment is conventional, but anyone who has spent much time with the biographical traces of Shakespeare's life will understand Digges' point. The traces are, for the most part, frustratingly inert, and those that are not inert are frustratingly ambiguous. They provide shadowy glimpses of the questions that haunt most lives: Who am I? In what can I put my faith? Whom can I love? What should I do with my time on earth? In his works Shakespeare pursued these questions with a passionate intelligence, intensity and eloquence so remarkable that many readers instinctively desire to approach him more nearly, to penetrate the barrier that time, the negligence of his contemporaries and perhaps his own reserve erected. There is nothing amiss with this desire: it is deeply human, the consequence of Shakespeare's own great gift in seeming to speak so directly across the centuries. But its satisfaction lies in the imagination.

NOTES

1 Margreta de Grazia, *Shakespeare Verbatim: The Reproduction of Authenticity and the 1790 Apparatus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 43–4.

2 Jonson's opinions on literature and life were recorded both by himself, in *Timber*, and by the Scottish man of letters, William Drummond of Hawthornden. On the interest the authorities took in Marlowe, see Charles Nicholl, *The Reckoning: The Murder of Christopher Marlowe* (London: Cape, 2002), and David Riggs, *The World of Christopher Marlowe* (London: Faber, 2004).

3 Chettle, in E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), vol. II, p. 189.

4 Letter of Abraham Sturley, in ibid., vol. II, p. 101.

5 Aubrey, in Chambers, ibid., vol. II, p. 252.

6 *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. Stephen Booth (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 548.

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2

JEFF DOLVEN AND SEAN KEILEN

Shakespeare's reading

Most of what Shakespeare wrote was played before it was read. The Sonnets are an exception, and *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, which he probably saw through the press himself. But for the most part he committed his words to the mouths of actors, and the printers of the quartos and First Folio came later, doing their work sometimes illicitly, then posthumously. Shakespeare was a man of the theatre, not a bookworm. But then again – what performance of Shakespeare is *not* informed by reading? There is the reading that actors do as they commit scripts to memory. There is the life of reading that literate members of an audience bring to the playhouse. Finally there is what Shakespeare himself read, his sources and influences. That idiosyncratic bibliography – a compost of school text and eight-penny romance and chronicle history – has been painstakingly reconstructed by generations of scholars. But the plays also have a great deal to say about *how* he read, and what he thought about the whole business of reading. Though reading may be, after sleep, the least dramatic of activities, Shakespeare returns again and again to scenes where a character is perusing a letter or turning a page or brandishing or just talking about a book. The result is a sporadic but career-long meditation on what reading is for.

So what *is* reading for? Or what *was* it for? To ask that question of the late sixteenth century is to enter an urgent contemporary debate. London's multiplying printing presses, rising literacy and an explosion of vernacular writing put pressure on the institutions – church, school, court – once accustomed to regulating reading lives. Around 1581, a browser in the book stalls of St Paul's could find devotional manuals and recipe books alongside romances like *The Wandering Knight*, 'a work worthy of reading', as the title page protests. A good humanist might trace such boasts to Horace's *Ars Poetica* and its injunction that a poem both teach and delight. But in these new fictions nods to Horace were probably outnumbered by winks.

Such an uneasy marriage of pleasure and profit betrays a culture where reading was moving beyond the institutional contexts where its value had

or composition worth knowing, any point of orthography, figure of speech, or rhetorical passages'.[2] It is easy to see how one might miss the forest of narrative and argument amidst those philological trees. But maxims constitute in themselves one idea of the profit of reading, embraced by Polonius when he prepares his son, Laertes, for the temptations of Paris: 'And these few precepts in thy memory / See thou character' (1.3.58–9).

The power of a choice aphorism was not lost on Stratford's most curious student. *Sententiae* round out many sonnets ('The hardest knife ill used doth lose his edge' (95)) and sound in the mouths of his aristocrats and commoners, kings and clowns. In *Hamlet*, however, they are handled with special cynicism. 'Words, words, words' (2.2.192), scoffs the prince when Polonius finds him with a book, and he goes on to disburden himself of a collection of old saws about old men. This ongoing impersonation of a bitter ex-schoolboy gives ironic point to his famous delay. The justifying end of a humanist education was praxis: boys were supposed to learn to read for action, and the commonplace book was a tool for making their reading accessible and adaptable to occasions of state. Hamlet, so desperate for a path to action, grows disgusted with books altogether, as the refuge of his own paralysis – a bitter reflection on what his training offers in an hour of need.

As Hamlet loses confidence in books, however, he begins to explore the resources of the theatre. Not only does he adopt his famous antic disposition, but at a crucial moment he dashes off new lines for an old play. Here, too, there is a debt to school. Much instruction took the form of catechism from the grammar book, so boys were reading scripts from the beginning. Older boys would participate in the more elaborated, improvised drama of *disputatio*, debating such themes as 'Should one marry?' or 'Should one go to sea?' before their classmates, exercising rhetorical techniques learned from ancient (Quintilian, Aphthonius) and modern (Susenbrotus) textbooks. Taking either side in such debates, they were trained to adopt the lawyer's pragmatical orientation towards the truth. They learned imitation, too, via techniques like double translation, casting a Latin text into English, then into Latin again. The more ambitious schoolmasters, if they followed the advice of Roger Ascham's *The Scholemaster* (1570), introduced their boys to imitations already embedded in the canon, Virgil of Homer, Ovid of Virgil.

Towards these various kinds of reading, Prince Hamlet adopts two distinctive attitudes. The first we might call *reading as refuge*. From the princes in *Love's Labour's Lost* to Prospero in his library, characters in Shakespeare's plays repeatedly retreat into study, reading to forget as much as to remember. But Hamlet also indulges in pedantic game-playing, the 'words, words, words' spouted elsewhere by overstuffed schoolmasters like Holofernes (*Love's Labour's Lost*) or Gerald (*The Two Noble Kinsmen*). We can call

this *quibbling reading*: no profit, but considerable comic pleasure in its idle ingenuities. Hamlet escapes both sorts of bookishness. He may hold a codex in Act 2, but by Act 5 he holds a skull, and then a rapier, a progress of props that carries him ever further from Wittenberg. But then again, his additions to *The Mousetrap* (and the letter he writes to save his skin) display gifts of stylistic imitation that are nothing if not the fruits of a humanist education. Shakespeare may have missed no opportunity to make fun of a schoolmaster, and have seen in reading risks of abstraction, solipsism and pedantry. But like Hamlet, his debt to his education is everywhere.

Brutus

Brutus, too, is a great reader. The description of his devotion to books in Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives* caught the playwright's attention. 'Brutus, being in Pompey's camp, did nothing but study all day long, except he were with Pompey ... Furthermore, when others slept, or thought what would happen the morrow after, he fell to his book, and wrote all day long till night, writing a breviary of Polybius.'[3] A breviary is an abridgement, Polybius is the Roman historian and Brutus, in the camp of Caesar's enemy, occupies himself with a grown-up version of a schoolboy's exercise, distilling the wisdom from another man's narrative, banishing thoughts of the future that distract his inferiors. This is a kind of *reading as self-discipline*, an exercise in Stoic detachment from worldly circumstance – like Hamlet's refuge, but claiming a more vigorous, principled autonomy. Such self-centring is what Shakespeare's Brutus wants from his book the night before his battle with Antony and Octavius: 'Let me see, let me see, is not the leaf turned down / Where I left reading? Here it is, I think' (4.2.324–5). The anachronism is often noted – Romans read scrolls, not books – but the point is clear enough. Brutus, in the onrush of events, wants to go back to the page where he was before.

What is Shakespeare's Brutus reading – or what might Shakespeare have imagined him reading? Perhaps Polybius, or perhaps, anachronistically, the Roman philosophers who did most to convey Stoic doctrine to the Elizabethans, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius. The Stoic strain so evident in the Roman plays informed the curriculum from the start. The *Catonis Disticha*, or Cato's distichs, let students practise their Latin on maxims like *Plus vigila semper nec somno deditus esto; / Nam diuturna quies vitiis alimenta ministrat* ('We ought to take heed, that we lose not the greatest part of our life with sleep namely since of the same many vices be engendered'). Aesop's ubiquitous *Fables* feature a maxim at the end, as in the story of the wolf and the lamb: *satis peccavit, qui resistere non potuit* ('he sinned enough who

was not able to refrain').[4] A more generically various diet awaited students in later forms, but still with a generous helping of Roman virtue. At the Plymouth school, it was Johannes Sturm's school edition of Cicero, leavened by Terence's comedies, prized as models of conversational Latin. By the sixth form, Virgil, Ovid and Horace. History, too: the older boys at Canterbury read 'the best poets and historians', the latter probably including Sallust, Livy, Justin, Valerius Maximus or Julius Caesar himself.

The humanists who prescribed this canon – men like Erasmus, Sturm, Sir Thomas Elyot (*The Boke Named the Governour*, 1531) and Ascham (*The Scholemaster*, 1570) – advocated reading these books personally, in a double sense. First, *reading for the style*. In his *Ciceronianus* (1528) Erasmus asserts that 'it is stupid to try to write in another man's humour and endeavour to have [his] mind breathing in what you write'. Better, he says, to digest reading such that your speech will be 'redolent of your personality, your sensitivities, your feelings'.[5] Imitation is a balance between respecting the strangeness of another mind (or another time) and finding and fashioning yourself in the words that affect you. In contemplating this ideal we are a long way from Hamlet's estranged 'Words, words, words'. Shakespeare could hardly have escaped contact with such high humanistic ambitions, articles of faith for his friend Ben Jonson and much bandied about, if not always piously, by so-called university wits like Robert Greene and Thomas Nashe.

The charisma of exemplary lives also asks readers to take the past personally: imitation was practical as well as stylistic, proposing the deeds of historical and sometimes fictional figures as patterns for action. Here is another sort of humanist profit in reading, *reading for exempla*. Early in *Julius Caesar*, Cassius flatters himself with an analogy to Aeneas (1.2.114–17), and Brutus in turn compares himself to another legendary ancestor – Junius Brutus, who liberated Rome from monarchy. 'There was a Brutus once that would have brooked / Th'eternal devil to keep his state in Rome / As easily as a king' (1.2.160–2). The preface to North's Plutarch, translated from Jacques Amyot's French, is full of incitement to such reading. By the contemplation of the self in the past's mirror, Amyot argued, the reader of history may proceed to glorious action all his own. Indeed, 'not to feel the sparks of desire of honour is an infallible sign of a base, vile, and cloyish nature'.[6] In the world of *Julius Caesar*, however, such imitative desire is an ambivalent business. How can a Stoic tell the difference between finding a model of conduct in the deeds of the past and projecting into history his present desires for wealth or power? Between principle and appetite? Shakespeare's Cicero observes sceptically that 'men may construe things after their fashion, / Clean from the purpose of the things themselves' (1.3.34–5), and the play appears

to wonder whether, were it not for the candle of the reader's desire, history's page could be read at all.

Such is Brutus' Stoic dilemma. But perhaps it should be said – tacking back again from character to author – that Shakespeare hardly seems to have been troubled by such scruples. The Plutarch he used for *Julius Caesar* was no school text and is only one of a host of history books he must have read on his own, not only classical historians, but also the English chroniclers, Edward Hall and Richard Grafton and above all Raphael Holinshed, whose *Chronicles* were in their second edition in 1587. Shakespeare's relation to Holinshed is typical, at least in its freedom. As with his ancient sources, he was liberal in his adaptation of the facts, reconstructing even the genealogies to suit his narrative needs. Moreover he quarried all these histories for some version of the same plot. His plays repeatedly enact a transition from some idealized and long-standing order to a new world of *Realpolitik*. The lurch from republic to monarchy described in *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* covers this ground, as do Bolingbroke's irregular succession in *Richard II*, Prince Hal's transformation into Henry V, even the murder of Duncan in *Macbeth*. We can only speculate what it was about his own moment – the always-about-to-end reign of Elizabeth and the succession of James – that made this story so urgent and appealing. But this was the plot that Shakespeare read for, and his skill in adapting his narrative sources went quite beyond the training his school would have provided.

But back to Brutus – who himself never gets back to the place in his book he marked so deliberately. Once Cassius recognizes that his friend's desire to mirror great deeds makes him vulnerable to self-deception, Brutus' fate is sealed: 'Well, Brutus, thou art noble; yet I see / Thy honourable mettle may be wrought / From that it is disposed' (1.2.302–4). Brutus is slow to catch fire and, having been lit, he is reluctant to burn, but it is not long before even he perceives Caesar as tyrant and himself as Rome's best hope for liberty. He is prompted by letters that Cassius has thrown through his window, supposedly written by Roman citizens exhorting him to imitate his ancestor. When letters are projectiles, it seems inevitable that reading will be projection: 'O Rome, I make thee promise, / If the redress will follow, thou receivest / Thy full petition at the hand of Brutus' (2.1.56–8). We are inducted into another problem of Shakespearian reading – *reading what you will*, no matter what is written. When he turns to his book on the eve of battle, Brutus tries to contain himself, all too aware that he has become like the man he killed. It is then that Caesar's ghost appears, as though to tell him how futile it is to seek in the pages of history a reprieve from events that he himself has set in motion.

Malvolio

In *Twelfth Night* the ambitions behind Malvolio's reading take the problem of interpretative desire to its limit, but this time the limit is comic. The puritanical steward's great scene of reading comes when he stumbles upon a counterfeit letter left in his path by Maria, his fellow servant in the household of the countess Olivia. Malvolio fantasizes that their mistress harbours a secret passion for him, and the letter, written in an imitation of Olivia's hand, plays upon that hope – most ingeniously in its last line, 'M. O. A. I. doth sway my life' (2.5.97). Throughout all the plays there is great traffic in letters, between lovers or soldiers or senators, and they are always read by someone, like Brutus, who wants something from them. When Malvolio reads this one aloud, he makes no attempt to disguise from himself what he hopes for: 'And the end: what should that alphabetical position portend? If I could make that resemble something in me. ... to crush this a little, it would bow to me' (106–8, 123). Here is another case of reading what you will, seasoned with a modest gift for quibbling – reading not as self-discipline, now, but as wish-fulfilment.

Shakespeare himself seems to have taken what he wanted from the sources of *Twelfth Night* even more freely than from the histories – a business not so much of crushing as dismantling them and absconding with whatever was useful. The deep lineage of these plays of confused identity and relentless reversal runs to Roman New Comedy, and like most of his fellow comic playwrights Shakespeare was a student, in school and after, of Terence and Plautus. Sometimes those borrowings are direct, as in *The Comedy of Errors*, based closely on Plautus' *Menaechmi*. In *Twelfth Night* the influence is more mediated, and the main plot – Olivia and Orsino and the nearly identical twins Viola and Sebastian – is adapted from the Barnabe Rich tale 'Of Apolonius and Silla'. Rich tells the story of Silla, who disguises herself as a boy and runs away from home to serve the duke she loves, only to find herself wooing his intended Julina on his behalf. The characters' affections are somewhat purified by Shakespeare – there is, in Rich's version, a scandalous pregnancy, and Silla's brother is considerably more cavalier in his amorous conduct than *Twelfth Night*'s Sebastian – but the lineaments of the plot are retained.

The volume that gathers these tales – 'for the only delight of the courteous gentlewoman', as Rich puts it on his title page – is called *Riche His Farewell to Militarie Profession* (1581), and its composition describes in little the growing market for vernacular fictions in Shakespeare's era. Three of the stories are versions of *novelle* from Giraldi Cinthio's *Gli Hecatommithi* (1565), prime examples of the Italian tales that the schoolmaster Ascham

about Dido in Act 2. Gonzalo's passing reference to 'widow Dido' sparks twenty lines of debate with Sebastian and Adrian about her marital history, sustained by a misunderstanding: Gonzalo properly remembers that Dido's husband, Sychaeus, was murdered, while the others, forgetting this, are hung up on the question of her dubious marriage to Aeneas ('What if he had said "widower Aeneas" too?' (2.1.78)). Generations of scholars have worried about the significance of this allusion, but it may just as well be said to stand for the obliquity of the play's relation to the epic, and perhaps to remind us how dependent allusion is upon imperfect audiences. Does all this Virgil point us to a kind of counter-epic, contrasting the forgiveness that Prospero extends to his enemies with the slaughter of Turnus, Aeneas' rival, at the conclusion of Virgil's poem? Is Prospero's return home to Milan a kind of heroic backsliding? The *Aeneid* lends the play weight, but it has been hard to agree in which direction its ballast lists.

If we try to bring Shakespeare into focus as a reader of his poetic predecessors, not just as an opportunistic borrower, what then of Ovid? The most conspicuous use of the *Metamorphoses* in *The Tempest* is the speech where Prospero abjures his magic. 'Ye elves of hills' (5.1.33), he begins, borrowing from Arthur Golding's rendering of Medea's incantation over the body of old Aeson: 'Ye airs and winds: ye elves of hills, of brooks, of woods alone, / Of standing lakes, and of the night, approach ye everyone' (7.265–6).[8] There are other scraps from Golding as the speech continues, as well as echoes of Ovid's Latin – whether from memory, or from a book open on his writing table. (He would not be the first imperfect Latinist to make such use of a crib.) But the allusion matters because of the story it recalls. Medea is a magician, a commonplace in Renaissance treatments of witchcraft, and the spell that she casts in Ovid's poem rejuvenates Jason's father. When Prospero invokes her words, he is preparing to revive the conspirators he has charmed into compliance; perhaps he is thinking about his own age too. But most importantly, the witch is a revenger, who will turn on Jason and slaughter their children when he betrays her. Shakespeare knows his source, and maybe Prospero does too, and yet he does not seem bound to reach the same conclusion. Yes, he makes use of the resurrection trope that Ovid gives him (he has been preoccupied with making men new throughout the play), but in choosing to drown his book, he forswears new youth and revenge. Every third thought, he later remarks, will be his *own* death.

It is worth contrasting the way Shakespeare handles Virgil and Ovid in *The Tempest* with the early play that brings them most conspicuously together, *Titus Andronicus*. There, Tamora suggests that she and Aaron play at being Dido and Aeneas in the forest, only to be convinced by Aaron that they should make the rape of Philomela the model for their imitation – an Ovidian plot

manifested both as a series of increasingly gruesome borrowings and also as a material book, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In its pages, Titus recognizes himself as a character in a revenge story that has but one ending: 'For worse than Philomel you used my daughter, / And worse than Progne I will be revenged' (5.2.193–4). In *The Tempest*, by contrast, allusions to Virgil and Ovid tend to be implicit and except, perhaps, for Prospero it is rarely clear that characters who allude to their stories know they are doing so. Unable to hold Virgil and Ovid in the same frame of reference, *Titus Andronicus* gives ample evidence that Shakespeare could talk about these poets the way that his contemporaries did, at opposite ends of a spectrum of ideas about civility and barbarism. But in *The Tempest*, Virgilian and Ovidian texts float more freely through a range of meanings, with respect to each other and to the events unfolding in the play.

The difference from *Titus* to *Tempest* suggests something about Shakespeare's own development as a reader, and one more of his sources may help us to see where that development leads. Among his debts to authors from his own time, one stands out: Michel de Montaigne, whose *Essays* appeared in John Florio's English translation in 1603. The most prominent borrowing from this book is the vision of a utopian commonwealth that Gonzalo fashions from the description of New World societies in 'Of Cannibals'. More recently, scholars have queried this passage for evidence of Shakespeare's views of European colonialism in North America and the English conquest of Ireland. Here, in free speculation that is reminiscent of the foolery of Shakespeare's most knowing clowns, Gonzalo's adaptation of Montaigne models a kind of reading that seems typical of *The Tempest*'s relation to all its sources. Gonzalo's textual wit, with its lightness of touch, tolerance of internal contradiction, and readiness to sympathize with its raw materials and its audience, suggests that there is something more at stake in reading than a literal or exhaustive application of text to context, book to life.

The Tempest's allusions to Virgil and Ovid do not oblige its plot to end in blood, and Montaigne is a humanizing influence in the story. Nevertheless, Prospero's book must be drowned. For there is still a shadow that falls on this magician's reading – doubly dark with self-absorption and discipline – and perhaps that shadow darkens all reading in Shakespeare's plays, where there are no beneficent schoolmasters to be found, and not much happy leafing under trees. And yet there is also ample evidence in *The Tempest* that Shakespeare himself was a different kind of reader from Prospero. For one thing, the range of Shakespeare's books wildly exceeds the catalogue of Prospero's library. There is Virgil and Ovid, of whom Prospero may not be entirely innocent; but there is also Hakluyt, Strachey and any number of other examples of travel writing that walk a fine line between fact and

fantasy. The walls of the Milanese library in which Prospero devoted himself to 'liberal studies' were presumably lined with books written in classical languages, drawn from the range of Renaissance disciplines, but Shakespeare's reading extends itself into popular and vernacular writing and, as we have seen, includes imitations of contemporary romance plots, English translations of Latin poetry and the adaptive mediations of Stoic philosophy that are characteristic of Montaigne's essays.

And this is only the first distinction that we might draw between Prospero and Shakespeare as readers. If, from the stuff of Virgil and Ovid, Prospero makes a pageant of forgiveness that embraces every other character in the play, not everyone plays his part willingly. *The Tempest* reaches its conclusion without staging the massacre that announced Odysseus' long-awaited homecoming, or launched Aeneas on his way to Rome, or made Medea a horror to the Greeks, but in the final scene Antonio's silence – like Ariel's pleas to be released from bondage – reminds us that Prospero's mercy and generosity are coercive. In contrast, Shakespeare's extraordinarily wide reading brings him to a point from which he appears to be free in a way that Prospero is not: free not to judge, among the many different perspectives to which the plays gives voice, which is right and which is wrong. The success of Prospero's forgiveness is qualified by his insistence that there is only one way to interpret his story correctly, or even that there is only one story to tell. How different Shakespeare's reading is: how disinclined to struggle with the texts from which it borrows; how apt to entertain the possibilities that arise from them; and how unencumbered by the idea that to read, or to write, well is to arrive at a point beyond all contradiction.

Shakespeare?

Reading as refuge. Reading what you will. Reading for style and for plot. Reading as quibbling; as foolery; reading as self-discipline, and as a tool for disciplining others. Reading for profit, reading for pleasure. It is something of a commonplace among historians of this polyglot practice that, in the sixteenth century, reading was a more communal business, more likely to be done out loud and with others. Certainly Shakespeare's London harboured no class of cloistered novel readers, any more than it harboured novels. And yet, whatever route we take through Shakespeare's career-long meditation on books and their uses, we encounter the idea that reading is somehow a private activity. More than anything else it was the propensity for solace, solipsism and self-delusion that attracted his attention. Whether it is Hamlet pondering his tables or Brutus brooding in his tent, Malvolio strolling in the garden or Prospero deep in study, reading in his plays is perforce on

display, there to be scrutinized and interpreted by other characters and by the audience – but on display by accident, under protest or as a performance of power. In making reading so much the subject of his dramatic work, Shakespeare sought to understand a potentially reclusive activity with the resources of a profoundly social genre, exploring what it means to read and asking whether one ought to read otherwise, or even not at all.

Having read his works, could we then – as a speculative exercise – write the scene of Shakespeare reading? We know so little about the physical particulars. Did he read with a pen in hand, filling the margins with comment, as many of his contemporaries did? None of his books survives to tell us. Did he own the books he read, or did he borrow them from other men, or women? Did he keep a library? Did he read at night, by candlelight? On the job, between the acts; reclining in bed? Reading itself is such an inscrutable activity, and to watch someone read is to be forcefully reminded of everything we cannot know about another mind. Shakespeare, whose mind has always seemed so unknowable, recedes from us yet again as we try to picture him in study, recedes towards the very literate privacy that his plays relentlessly pry open. About that privacy – which lies at the heart of even the most public exhibition of reading – he seems to have had his doubts. Shakespeare loved books, and made much of them, for pleasure and profit, but he was always suspicious of reading.

NOTES

1 Robert D. Pepper (ed.), *Four Tudor Books on Education* (Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1966), p. 227.
2 Erasmus, *Collected Works* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974–), vol. XXIV, ed. Craig R. Thompson, pp. 682–3.
3 Plutarch, *Shakespeare's Plutarch*, ed. Walter W. Skeat (London: Macmillan, 1875), p. 129.
4 *Catonis Disticha* (London: 1562), A7r–v; *Aesopi Fabulae* (London: 1568), B1r.
5 Erasmus, *Collected Works*, vol. VI, p. 402.
6 Plutarch, *The Liues of the Noble Grecians and Romanes* (1579), *iiiir.
7 Roger Ascham, *The Schoolmaster (1570)*, ed. Lawrence V. Ryan (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 67.
8 *Shakespeare's Ovid, Being Arthur Golding's Translation of 'The Metamorphoses'*, ed. W. H. D. Rouse (New York: Norton & Company, 1961), p. 142.

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The history of the study of the other extant theatrical documents of the period shows a similar sort of wish to generalize on the basis of scanty and very partial evidence. Although most of the individual surviving manuscripts of plays from the period have been catalogued, described and edited, what they actually represent has been much debated. Broad categories for these manuscripts – authorial 'foul papers', scribal 'prompt books', non-theatrical scribal copies – have been established, but they have also been questioned. Notoriously, those manuscripts are especially hard to date, their authorship may well be uncertain and the companies for which they were produced may not be definitely identifiable. The example of the manuscript of *Sir Thomas More*, three pages of which are thought to be in Shakespeare's hand, springs to mind as posing many problems of this kind: it is a rich source of information about all sorts of contemporary practices of commissioning, collaborative composition, revision, licensing and censorship, but it is also in the end almost by definition an exceptional case, and generalizing on the basis of its uncertain and much-disputed evidence is hazardous.

To a great extent the same goes for the surviving printed texts. At least these can usually be dated fairly securely, but what they represent may still be uncertain. Again, the desire to establish neat categories for dramatic printed texts has advanced general understanding of the subject: there are 'good' and 'bad' quartos; like plays in Shakespeare's First Folio (1623), the 'good' may derive from 'foul paper' or from 'prompt book' manuscripts. (See Chapter 5.) But what exactly the 'bad' quartos represent or even how the texts of the 'good' quartos may relate to what was performed on the stage is disputed. There is no simple model that can describe the relations between different authors or theatre companies and printers or publishers: each case needs to be looked at individually. In a comparable way, different printers found the mechanical tasks of setting and printing plays more or less easy. Although there are limits to our knowledge and the dangers of generalization are always present, it is nevertheless possible to provide a usable picture of theatrical activity by concentrating on what is known about how Shakespeare worked, while recognizing that he too was exceptional in what he wrote and how it reached different audiences.

Authorship and playwriting as a profession

During the sixteenth century, contesting senses began to emerge of what a 'profession' meant. The older idea that a profession was a vocation or calling with a body of knowledge that could be gained only after long training and with a formal qualification was supplemented by the idea that it was what people did to gain their living. In that second sense, Shakespeare was

clearly a professional playwright: whether he had an apprenticeship as such, whether he felt the theatre was a vocation or not are matters for argument. But he was more than a playwright: he had other careers – as a poet, an actor, a sharer in his theatre company, and as a man of business and of property – all of them successful and financially rewarding. Authors' earnings during this period are hard to estimate, not least because the actual rewards of patronage are unknown: his relations with the Earl of Southampton (to whom the narrative poems were dedicated) and the Earls of Pembroke (to whom the First Folio was dedicated) remain matters for speculation. It is, however, fairly clear that to make any sort of decent living from the pen alone required hard work. When Thomas Heywood in *The English Traveller* (1633) claimed to have had 'either an entire hand or at the least a main finger' in 220 plays, he may have been exaggerating, but the careers of other writers of the period suggest that a degree of hyperactivity was essential to survive as a professional writer. Heywood's fifty years as a writer compare well with Shakespeare's twenty-five, during which he was involved in the writing of around forty plays and in the production of three substantial volumes of poems. Equally, the collected works of Jonson, Middleton, Greene, Dekker, Ford, Massinger, and Beaumont and Fletcher suggest how busy authors had to be to make any sort of living, but they also indicate that other playwrights – Peele, Kyd, Webster – may not have lived entirely by their pens, although the question of lost works hovers over this subject.

The need to earn a decent living undoubtedly spurred an author's productivity. Yet a concern with authorship, exemplified by Shakespeare's standing as the paradigm of the individual author, may have passed the notice of contemporary playgoers. Since original advertisements for the performance of plays have not survived, it is impossible to judge how much prominence was given to naming authors as part of a play's marketing. Early theatregoers rarely mention who wrote the plays they saw, and the full extent of the collaborative nature of authorship for the popular theatre was probably as unknown then as the correct writer credits were in Hollywood's golden age. Somewhere between a half and two-thirds of vernacular plays written for the popular theatre between 1590 and 1642 appear to have been produced by two or more men in collaboration; figures for the academic drama and for the children's companies point to a far greater reliance on solitary authorship.[1] By its nature, it has been argued, the theatre is a site for collaboration, yet it is remarkable how many marks of individual genius still survive in the texts that have come down to us.

Collaboration was not a fixed and always formal arrangement: it might take many different forms, and a single model for the process by which jointly written plays came into being is not adequate. The original division

of a play between two authors, such as that Shakespeare and Fletcher appear to have undertaken with *King Henry VIII*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and *Cardenio*, might be supplemented by interventions to complete unfinished plays or to make them actable, to supply the initial plot, additional scenes, dialogue or other material, and to incorporate revisions resulting from the experience of performance. It is quite likely that pairs or teams of writers revised each other's work; they may have been expected to follow a style favoured by the company or the entrepreneur that employed them. Equally, a play might need to be revised for new circumstances as a result of changes to personnel, to meet the wishes of the theatre company for which it was being written, or to adapt it for production in a new location or for a special occasion. On the other hand, common sense suggests that most players and audiences would have wanted plays that were internally coherent and made sense: creaking joints between parts written by different authors, muddled plots and stylistic incongruities make for poor theatre. In the same way, modern teams of writers, film-makers and drama producers strive to create 'artistic' wholes which will satisfy their audiences.

The growing scholarly consensus around Shakespeare's collaborating hand in some early works (*Edward III*, *1 Henry VI*, *Titus Andronicus* and *Sir Thomas More*) with a variety of authors (Peele, Kyd and Nashe in the two histories and the tragedy, and Munday, Heywood, Chettle and Dekker in *More*) has been complemented by arguments about Middleton's original contribution to *Timon of Athens* and about his possible revisions to *Macbeth* and *Measure for Measure*, as well as by speculation about the nature of Shakespeare's links with the unsavoury George Wilkins that gave rise to *Pericles*.[2]

Actors may have had the glamour and been the subject of the salacious stories that went with the theatrical profession, but on the title pages of early play texts names counted – or perhaps some names counted, or at the very least Shakespeare's name counted. Unusually, he must have had the experience of seeing work (poetical as well as theatrical) attributed to him that he knew he had not written: as early as 1594 the anonymous tragedy of *Locrine* was said to have been 'Newly set forth, overseen and corrected by W. S.'

Composition

Henslowe's diary suggests that his writers took between four and six weeks (sometimes fewer) to finish plays, and that preparations before their initial performance took about two weeks. The speed at which plays were written resulted from the need to feed the ravenous appetite for popular

entertainment: teams of writers, it is supposed, could write more quickly than individual authors.

One obvious form of collaboration entailed an author supplying the original plot or outline for a play which another author or authors then wrote up. It is probably in this sense that Francis Meres described Anthony Munday in 1598 as 'our best plotter'. Devising plots, like pitching scenarios in the modern cinema, might well have been a separate activity from writing the resulting play. One way of dividing the work of writing might have been to allocate the source book (Holinshed's chronicles or North's Plutarch, for example) from which the plot was taken to one author, while the other worked on material he devised for himself or took from another source. The theatre company or a theatrical entrepreneur may have owned copies of several such source books from which plots could be extracted and lent them out to authors, so that Shakespeare need not have bought or owned copies of the books from which he adapted material.

In writing plays, whether singly or collaboratively, the unit of composition in which dramatists worked might have been the single line, the speech, the role for the character or, quite simply, the comic or tragic element. The most obvious unit might have been the scene, or part of a scene, or the act. The issue should be easy to determine, but this is not quite the case, for it is complicated by arguments about act and scene divisions. Although intervals between acts had been used in private performances, as well as at court, at the Inns of Court and by the children's companies, and in plays written by University Wits, in the popular theatre they seem not to have come into general use until 1607 or later. Acts themselves were not inherent elements in the popular theatre before about 1607.[3]

Yet perhaps scenes and acts were only elements in the story during the composition of plays. One solid piece of evidence survives of an author's defining his hand in a play. Dekker deposed that his part of *Keep the Widow Waking* consisted of 'two sheets of paper containing the first act' along with 'a speech in the last scene of the last act of the Boy who had killed his mother'.[4] In this case, the unit for composition seems not necessarily to have been a discretely identifiable part of a play, such as an act or a scene, so much as the sheet of paper, each sheet consisting when initially folded once of two leaves or four pages. The importance of the sheet is clear from a variety of sources, including Henslowe's diary and the licences of the Masters of the Revels (the official in charge of entertainments at court). This is not to say that the practice of composing plays by the sheet was invariable. In this respect, as in so many others, the so-called Melbourne Manuscript – a folded sheet of an autograph play attributed to James Shirley, discovered in 1985 among the Coke family papers at Melbourne Hall in Derbyshire – provides

ambiguous evidence.[5] The writing on the sheet begins in what is clearly the middle of a scene, and it is not entirely certain that the scene ends with the fourth and final page. As the scribe reached the last page he wanted to get as much material in as possible, with the result that the page looks distinctly crowded: presumably the scribe did not want to start a new sheet. The Melbourne Manuscript suggests that the sheet as a unit played some part in the play's evolution.

The manuscript

Whether working alone or collaborating, at some stage the playwright had to put pen to paper. It is possible that the company or the entrepreneur supplied the playwrights with paper, which would have been relatively expensive, in loose sheets. Authors might fold the sheets to produce inner and outer margins for their writing: mistakes often found in the form and position of speech prefixes and some stage directions may have occurred because dramatists tended to add them outside the folded margins after the main dialogue had been written. The common handwriting of the period was the secretary hand which had its own distinctive forms, abbreviations (especially the tilde [~] for omitted *m* and *n*) and easily confused letters (such as *p* and *x*, *r* and *v*, and so on). Stage directions, speech prefixes and names of people and of places were generally written in an italic hand which would usually have required a pen cut differently from the one used for secretary hand. Writing with a handcut pen with handmade ink on handmade paper of varying quality and smoothness was not an easy business. A sloping desk with a cloth cover was considered the ideal place for writing, but it could be carried out more or less anywhere with a solid surface such as a table or, with a penner (a portable pen-and-ink set) and a writing box, wherever was convenient; the private study might give way to much more public places, such as the theatre or the tavern.

In addition to their source books, dramatists may well have written with note- or table- or commonplace books beside them.[6] These might contain anything from odd words to striking images or sayings, to whole speeches: Webster's use of second-hand ideas and quotations has been explored in depth.[7] The initial process of composition might be relatively slow or quite rapid, needing much, heavy revision or very little. 'His mind and hand went together', John Heminges and Henry Condell wrote of Shakespeare in the First Folio, 'And what he thought, he uttered with that easiness, that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers' – to which Ben Jonson replied, 'Would he had blotted a thousand.' Heminges and Condell might not have realized that the manuscripts from which they

apparently, on commission for himself, supplies some evidence for the form this sort of activity might have taken. Crane had been working for authors in the theatre from as early as 1618, when he prepared a copy of Jonson's masque *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*, and went on to supply the printer's copy that lies behind various dramatic texts, including five or six of Shakespeare's plays for the First Folio, as well as Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*. A great deal has been found out about Crane's activities and about his distinctive scribal practices (parentheses, elisions, 'massed entry' stage directions and so on), but there is no reason to think that the sorts of copying service that Crane supplied could not have been undertaken twenty or even thirty years before he came on the scene.[12]

Revision

If theatrical manuscripts had a commercial value, it is possible that they would proliferate by hand in the same way that poems, letters, tracts and other documents did. London audiences demanded a high turnover of new plays supplemented by frequent revivals – a well-organized system of copying and storing manuscripts would have been an essential feature of the theatre companies' business. Furthermore, when companies, for whatever reason, went on tour outside London or in Europe, they might well have needed to take with them copies of the plays they were to perform. All this argues against a simple two-manuscript model for theatrical production. In the same way, authors almost certainly kept manuscript copies of their own plays – they might not have been the cleanest or fairest of copies, but they were probably usable for the purposes of revision.

No subject has attracted more attention in the last twenty or so years than the question of the authorial revision of plays of this period. There are at least three reasons for this. First, if Shakespeare did revise some of his plays and poems, it undermines his image as a spontaneous genius. If revision shows authorial rethinking, then it usually does so in the light of theatrical experience: therefore it is the result of collaboration of one kind or another. Second, a theory of revision chimes with ideas about textual instability and indeterminacy. If, for example, quarto and Folio *King Lear* definitely are different plays, it becomes impossible to say which is the 'real' one, indeed which is to be read first. The certainty of a single conflated *King Lear* can be replaced by two or more texts, offering the reader distinctive works in the process of becoming, rather than a single finished and evolved masterpiece. In this uncertain textual world, readers can play a significant part in the selection and even creation of the work(s). Facsimile and hypertext editions

allow them to choose their own texts and eliminate – so it is argued – the allegedly intrusive role of the editor.

The third reason for interest in revision relates to a desire to understand more about Shakespeare's creative process. In the past, Shakespeare was thought to have been indifferent to the publishing of his plays. For one thing, since the play texts belonged to the theatre company, he had no financial stake in selling them, except as a sharer of that company. In addition, he was believed to have intended his plays exclusively for the theatre, where they were subject to continual change, as a result of suggestions from the actors, for example, or a change of performance venue. But the revision theory allows for the possibility that these changes might represent Shakespeare's second or even third thoughts. Thus texts once thought to reveal nothing more than the vagaries of the playhouse and printing office are now being subjected to minute bibliographical and critical analysis in the expectation that they will provide insights to the process of Shakespeare's writing.

What were play texts?

Shakespeare's plays were published (made public) by being performed, but around half of them were also published during his lifetime in print – the other half appearing in the First Folio after his death. The editions of his plays and of his poems that he might have seen were produced mainly in quarto, with a few in octavo: in a quarto book, the sheet of paper on which the text is printed is folded twice to produce a square-shaped book, in an octavo it is folded four times to produce a smaller, pocket-sized volume. Quartos of the plays, such as *Othello* in 1622, went on being produced after Shakespeare's death and after the First Folio's publication. Although there seems little doubt that the texts of the narrative poems *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594), with their signed dedications to the Earl of Southampton and the use of inscriptional capitals (large and small) for proper names in the later poem, were published on Shakespeare's behalf and with his approval, the status of his other poems, notably the Sonnets (1609) and of the plays is disputed. In the case of the Sonnets, which have several unresolved textual cruces of a kind not found in the narrative poems, the argument revolves around whether their publication was authorized by Shakespeare or whether the volume was in effect pirated by Thomas Thorpe, who is usually identified with the 'T. T.' of the book's enigmatic dedication. There are strong arguments for and against Shakespeare's hand in the book's publication, arguments that have also involved doubts about his authorship of the poem *A Lover's Complaint* that accompanied the Sonnets.[13]

The status of the play quartos (and octavos) is equally still a matter of dispute. When Heminges and Condell told 'the great variety of readers' of the First Folio that 'where (before) you were abused with divers 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', did they intend to condemn the texts of all the quartos or just some of them? During the course of the last century, scholarly opinion moved from thinking that all quartos were stolen and surreptitious to defining a particular group as being 'bad quartos': they were short, mangled parts of the text (when compared against 'good quartos' or the Folio), sometimes included material from other literary works or just obvious comic banter and rarely seemed performable. Such 'bad quartos' could be found among Shakespeare's plays (*Romeo and Juliet* in 1597, *Henry V* in 1600, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in 1602 and *Hamlet* in 1603) and elsewhere. How these 'bad quartos' came into being remains uncertain: various theories have been put forward, including the use of shorthand and the idea that they are, in effect, Shakespeare's first drafts (rather blotted) of his plays.[14] Most scholars tend to accept that they were in fact memorial reconstructions by one or more members of the theatre company that put them on – this would explain why some scenes in which those characters appear seem better remembered (when compared against 'good quartos' or the Folio) than others. Yet why it was thought worthwhile to try to reconstruct the plays from memory to sell to a stationer with all the attendant risk of accusations of piracy and of exposure is still by no means clear. Nor has anyone managed to explain convincingly the circumstances under which the plays were reconstructed, although it has often been said that these were versions produced for the provinces in time of plague when companies toured the country, forced to leave London without their prompt books.

The badness of the 'bad quartos' has been challenged, so that they are often now known as 'abbreviated' or 'suspect' texts. Although their dialogue and speeches are generally thought to be unreliable witnesses to what Shakespeare wrote, some scholars have argued that their stage directions ('*Enter the Ghost in his night-gown*') reveal something about contemporary performance practices. This calls into question what contemporary readers thought they were getting when they read one of those quartos. If it approximated in some distant way to what they saw on the stage – a corrupt version of a play, but one that could be performed within a few hours – then what do the texts of the 'good quartos' and of the Folio represent? A dozen or so of those 'good' texts are, by most modern standards, too long to be acted within the performance times that scholars generally attribute to