

Playwriting and Authorship—the Case of “Shakespeare”¹

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to dwell on the challenges faced by scholars in interpreting “Shakespeare’s plays” by looking into the complicated relationships between playwriting and authorship in Shakespeare’s time.

Many scholars of today, it seems to me, tend to hold on to some misleading assumptions about the theatrical conditions and play publication in Shakespeare’s time. Accordingly, they tend to ignore the impact produced by such factors as collaboration, script ownership, censorship, and textual variations as well as their influences on the problem of dramatic authorship. Using Robert Hapgood’s *Shakespeare the Theatre-Poet* as my starting point, I shall examine and explore these aspects mentioned above, and rethink the views of “the original plays by single authorship” upheld by him. I shall also touch upon the impact of post-structuralism upon the authorship of “Shakespeare’s plays” and the interpretations of these plays.

In my view, although Roland Barthes has proclaimed “the death of the author,” to most readers, including Hapgood, “Shakespeare” remains *present* in “his” plays. Nevertheless, this “presence-in-absence” is a textualized presence. By no means does it suggest an essentialized presence. And yet, to most Shakespearean scholars, once breaking away from the authorial intention and the ultimate meaning of a work, how to re-explore the issues created by reading and interpretation means at once opportunities and challenges.

KEY WORDS

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the Stationer's Company
canon
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intention

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Many scholars of today, it seems to me, tend to hold on to some misleading assumptions about the theatrical conditions and play publication in Shakespeare's time. Accordingly, more than a few scholars tend to ignore the impact produced by such factors as collaboration, script ownership, censorship, and textual variations as well as their influence on the problem of dramatic authorship. Below I will use Robert Hapgood's *Shakespeare the Theatre-Poet* as my wedging point, examining and exploring these aspects mentioned above, and rethink the views of "the original plays by single authorship" upheld by him. I will also touch upon the impact of post-structuralism upon the authorship of "Shakespeare's plays" and the interpretations of these plays, as well as the opportunities and challenges brought by this recent development.

1. An "Original" Dramatic Master, William Shakespeare

Robert Hapgood, in *Shakespeare the Theatre-Poet*, tells of his recent exposure to Eastern drama as a "dazzling" experience "that made Western theatre seem tame and timid by comparison." According to him, "[t]he experience widened my dramatic horizons in ways that have contributed positively

and radically to this book" (vii). On a second thought, however, he also found that in one crucial aspect much of what he called Eastern "total theatre" "is not as total as it seemed at first" (viii). In his opinion, "it is largely anonymous, its stories often coming from traditional sources, its dialogue often being improvised. It is drama without a dramatist" (viii).³ Accordingly, after the initial excitement, writes Hapgood, he "began to miss the sense of a single, original, master-hand in control ..." (viii). In his view, his "Eastern exposure" made him "realize how remarkable in the context of World theatre our Western playwrights are and how highly their presence should be valued, Shakespeare in particular" (viii).

Hapgood's impression of Oriental theatre is a very general one. His misunderstanding of, or even bias against, Oriental theatre and culture will not be easy to clarify in a few words; neither is this the main concern of this article. And yet this British- or European-centered perspective evidently can be renegotiated.

For instance, it is true that, in the case of such Chinese theatre as P'ing-chü (or Ching-hsi), we do not usually learn about the name of its author. But, apart from some exceptions, most traditional repertoires of P'ing-chü have been created by integrating the talents of many people, through a long period of time. This, in fact, can be thought of as a special kind of collective creation or collaboration. In this aspect, in fact, Chinese theatre bears a strong resemblance to Elizabethan-Jacobean theatre created in Shakespeare's time.⁴

Moreover, talking about deriving stories "from traditional sources" (viii), according to traditional source-study, even "Shakespeare's plays" are no exceptions. *As You Like It* for example, is generally regarded as based on Thomas Lodge's prose romance *Rosalynde* (1590). *The Comedy of Errors* is thought of as deriving from Titus Maccius Plautus's *Menaechmi*. The main source of *Othello*, according to traditional source-study, is a story in the *Hecatommithi* of Giraldo Cinthio

(1565). The story of *Macbeth* is probably taken from Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotlande and Irelande* (1587). And *The Winter's Tale* is a play that dramatized a story of a novel called *Pandosto, or The Triumph of Time* (1588) by Shakespeare's contemporary Robert Greene.⁵

The Winter's Tale, especially, can be used as an example for further exploration. Shih-chiu Liang, for instance, once pointed out that

Shakespeare followed Greene very closely, but he changed the names. Delphi, the oracle of Apollo, was mistaken by Greene as Delphos; Shakespeare made the same mistake. Shakespeare is frequently criticized for mistakenly regarding Bohemia as a country by sea. This is also because of his borrowing from Greene.⁶

Yet, between the two works there are obvious differences in plot as well. For example, in *Pandosto*, "the jealousy of Pandosto (Shakespeare's Leontes) grows gradually"; but in *The Winter's Tale*, "the jealousy was so altered as to grow all of a sudden and the evil aspects of human nature were stressed" (Liang 133). In the former, the baby originally is "left in a boat afloat"; in the latter, "the incident of Antigonus being chased by a bear was added" (Liang 134). The sheep-shearing scene and Autolycus are new additions too. Besides, "Pandosto falls in love with his own daughter because he did not know who she is. But Shakespeare omitted this unpleasant plot, leaving only some traces in the dialogue" (Liang 134). Further, in Greene's story, "the King repents and commits suicide after the death of the Queen." But in *The Winter's Tale* Queen Hermione comes back to life again, resulting in a plot which is "happier than the original story" (Liang 134).

Can this be used as evidence that indicates Shakespeare plagiarized his sources? Scholars' opinions diverge. Liang's comment is at once interesting and typical. He said, "To adapt

another person's novel into a play was not considered plagiarism in that time" (133). Thus we can see that this involves not only the difference of time but also the definition of "plagiarism" and the criteria scholars use.

Incidentally, it seems necessary to mention Greene's accusation of Shakespeare. In 1592, Greene warned his fellow playwrights Marlowe, Peele, and Nashe in his posthumous work, *Groatsworth of Wit*, urging them not to trust the players, "for there is an vpstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tygers heart wrapt in a Players hide, supposes he is as well able to bumbast out a blanke verse as the best of you." He further accused the player of being "in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scent in a countrie" (Greene 144). Though Greene made these accusations without mentioning the man by name, yet from his citing the line from *Henry VI*, Part III, and his toying of Shakespeare's name, scholars generally believe that Greene's target must be Shakespeare.

But can this be taken to mean that Shakespeare plagiarized the work of his fellow playwrights? This remains a controversial question, since in Shakespeare's time, it was very common to rewrite or adapt the works of other people. Besides, Greene probably had a bad record of selling the same play to two acting companies.⁷ As Wilson suggested,

We do not know either whether Shakespeare had anything to do with discovering the practice or with the boycott which almost certainly followed. But of one thing we can be sure: a man who has himself been convicted of dishonesty is likely to take a peculiar pleasure in bringing the same charge against one of his judges, no matter how much he has to trump it up for the purpose.⁸

How reliable Greene's words are remains a question. Moreover, even this complication itself has a similar author-

ship problem, since *Groatsworth of Wit* is a posthumous work edited by Henry Chettle before its publication. To what extent did Chettle intervene in the process of his editing? Is there any other person involved in this process? Such questions have also become a focus of scholars' inquiries.⁹

Now going back to Hapgood's admiration of Shakespeare's originality, I would like to point out that Hapgood's argument remains author-centered. Besides, the very idea of originality has placed the high value on originality and assigned relatively lower value to the unoriginal, the influenced. But it may seem ironic and contradictory when it is applied to "Shakespeare's plays" since most of Shakespeare's plays, according to traditional source-study, can be traced to certain sources, even though we might not label them "plagiarism." Thus we can see that the so called originality is already in part an adaptation. The distinction between the "original" and the influenced is in fact not a very clear one.

Besides, if we reflect upon Hapgood's argument, we probably cannot help but ask, as Michel Foucault does, in what sense and according to what criteria can we claim "this has been said" or "the same thing can [also] be found in this or that text"?¹⁰ Thus we can see, both the argument of Hapgood and that of traditional source-study are, in fact, faced with the problems of criteria.

In Shakespeare's time, plays were written mainly to be performed, not to be read.¹¹ Publication was by no means the most profitable channel for a successful playwright to present his works.¹² What is noteworthy, moreover, is that, according to Greg,

[t]he actual word "copyright" is apparently not found before the eighteenth century.... the exclusive property right of an author in his own work... was first recognized by what is known as the Copyright Act of 1709 [sic]-though the word does not occur in the Act

itself-which gave an author protection for fourteen years.¹³

During his lifetime, Shakespeare did not seem to be very enthusiastic about publishing his plays. In 1594 we saw the first appearance of his plays in print--*Henry VI, Part II, Titus Andronicus*, and (possibly) *The Taming of the Shrew*--all in quarto.¹⁴ But, it was not until 1598 that we saw the publication of *Love's Labour's Lost*, the first play to appear with Shakespeare's name, by Cuthbert Burby. It was not until seven years after his death in 1623 that the world saw the publication of the first collection of his plays, the First Folio, by two fellow players of his company, John Heminge and Henry Condell.

Shakespeare seems to be more enthusiastic about the publications of his poems instead. Here I am referring especially to *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. The one was announced for publication in April 1593; and the other, in May 1594. In both cases, Shakespeare had each of them printed by Richard Field, a reputable printer, and dedicated them both in careful prefatory letters to Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, a well-known patron of the arts.

II. Playwriting and Collaboration

Added to this, I would like to stress the fact that the plays which are available to us are hardly the ones written exclusively by Shakespeare himself without other people's collaboration or intervention. And Shakespeare himself might not necessarily have full control over what are known as "Shakespeare's plays."

Many plays that emerged in Elizabethan-Jacobean time were written by syndicates of two or more writers, and many renowned "playwrights" in this period were collaborators;

whether a play was done single-handedly by a playwright remains to be debated.

To name only a few: *Gorboduc*, the first English tragedy in blank verse, is a well-known example of collaboration. It was written by by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton during this period.

The collaboration of Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher is especially a renowned one in theatre history. Such works as *Philaster*, *The Maid's Tragedy*, *A King and No King*, and *The Scornful Lady* were collaborated on by them. Fletcher collaborated with William Rowley and Philip Massinger in *The Fair Maid of the Inn* as well; in addition, he also collaborated with Thomas Middleton and several other authors, including Shakespeare.

John Webster, who is renowned for *The White Devil*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, also collaborated with such playwrights as Thomas Middleton, Philip Massinger, Thomas Heywood, John Ford, and Thomas Dekker.

William Rowley was known to be a collaborator with Middleton, with whom he wrote in *A Fair Quarrel*, *The Changeling* and *The Spanish Gypsy*. He also collaborated with several other authors such as Webster, Heywood, Fletcher, Massinger, Ford, and Dekker.

Dekker, especially, was a prolific collaborator. He wrote *Troilus and Cressida* with Chettle; the first part of *The Honest Whore* with Middleton; *Northward Ho!*, *Westward Ho!*, and *Sir Thomas Wyatt*, with Webster; *The Witch of Edmonton* with Rowley and Ford; *The Page of Plymouth* and *Robert II King of Scots*, two tragedies now lost, with Jonson.

Jonson, apart from the two tragedies collaborated on with Dekker, landed twice in jail for part authorship of two plays. In both cases, the plays were written in collaboration with his fellow playwrights. *The Isle of Dogs*, a satiric comedy which is no longer extant, was written by Jonson and Thomas Nashe.¹⁵ *Eastward Ho!*, another satirical play, was written by

Jonson, John Marston, and George Chapman.¹⁶

Even Marlowe was not an exception. As a matter of fact, "scholars have long suspected that Marlowe wrote the serious and tragic portions of *Doctor Faustus*, by and large, and that a collaborator took responsibility for the comic horseplay."¹⁷ Furthermore, according to Bevington and Rasmussen, *Doctor Faustus* might not have been Marlowe's first collaborative work, since very likely he "had already collaborated in the writing of *Tamburlaine*" (70). And, if we seek to infer the authorship of *Doctor Faustus* only through the play's title-page, then it becomes even more imprecise and shifting. In the 1604 first Quarto, the name of the author was printed as "Ch. Marl.," but in the 1616 Quarto, it was printed as "Ch. Marklin."¹⁸

As to Shakespeare, we should notice that those plays usually attributed to his name are never confined to the thirty six plays collected in the First Folio. Nor, do these plays exclude the works collaborated on by Shakespeare and other playwrights. *Henry VIII*, a play collected in the First Folio, for example, has long been regarded as a work written by Shakespeare and Fletcher ever since James Spedding put forward his theory.¹⁹ *Timon of Athens*, another play in the First Folio, is also regarded by many scholars as a work collaborated on by Shakespeare and Middleton (Wells et al. 501). *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, a play collaborated on by Fletcher and Shakespeare but not included in the First Folio, is frequently regarded as a work of Shakespeare.²⁰ In addition, on the title page of *Cardenio*, a play performed by the King's Men in 1613, we can also find the names of both Shakespeare and Fletcher.

Moreover, despite that many tend to think that eighteen plays in the First Folio were published in quarto already, in fact the printed versions are different. The texts of such plays as *Henry VI, Part II*, *Titus Andronicus*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *Love's Labour's Lost*, as already mentioned, and the

1622 *Othello*, differ in many aspects from their "counterparts" in the First Folio. It is difficult to claim, in fact, that all the texts, in both categories, were original works written by Shakespeare alone.

As Wells et al. indicate, the two editors of the First Folio "do not explicitly tell us what attitude they adopted toward collaborative work; not does any contemporary" (73). Accordingly, in looking into the authorship of the plays, scholars can only "interpret their actions on the basis of what we know about attitudes toward dramatic authorship in the period" (73).

In accordance with scholars' conservative estimation, "Shakespeare wrote... at least 90 per cent of the words included in the Folio; the remainder was shared out between at least two major nameable dramatists and perhaps several minor unnameable ones" (Wells et al. 73). Accordingly, many believe "If the editors did not automatically or consistently exclude wholesale collaborations, they would be even less likely to eschew texts that had undergone minor theatrical adaptation" (Wells et al. 73)

These considerations aside, Shakespear's collaboration with his fellow players is also something that should be taken into account. The playwrights in Shakespear's time were frequently affected and constrained by some considerations that may not be familiar to the playwrights today. For example, some playwrights, like Shakespeare, only wrote for one acting company. Under such circumstances, whatever he wrote, he had to have the personnel of his company in mind, seeking opinions from his fellow players and shareholders. I am therefore not surprised to find that in *Shakespeare: Text into Performance* Peter Reynolds speculates that

The players, or certainly the leading players like Burbage, would have had at least some freedom to make changes in what Shakespeare wrote, and to suggest (and demand) modifications and rewrites. In the high pressure

circumstances under which Shakespeare worked, he probably welcomed and accepted this.²¹

Speculations apart, perhaps the remarks of Joan Holden, a contemporary American playwright, can also be illuminating:

Different shows I write in different ways. Some are much more collaborative. Sometimes somebody else has the brilliant idea and I write it. But in any case, it's collaborative in the sense that everybody talks about it--a whole lot, when there's time. Whoever has the idea has to sell it. The advantage of having an ensemble is that sometimes people can fill in holes for you.²²

And if we are willing to broaden a little our definition of collaboration or collective creation, we might even say that the playwright who wrote for an ensemble or a professional acting company not only collaborated with his or her fellow players, but with the audience as well. As a matter of fact, rarely would one professional acting company or its resident playwright ignore the responses of the audience and not touch up or readjust a play after its performance. The author(s) of "Shakespeare's plays" probably is (are) no exception.

III. Ownership and Authorship

To make matters more complex still, in Shakespeare's time, it was the owner, not necessarily the playwright, who had the proprietorship of a play.

Hapgood mentioned, "Usually, the companies bought scripts outright, for cash plus a benefit performance, and retained ownership of the scripts" (52).²³ But what he assumed about the relationship between the latter and the acting company, though widely accepted as a theory, remains debatable. From *Henslow's Diary*, for example, we find that

a small number of the plays performed by the Admiral's men from 1594 onwards were the personal property of Edward Alleyn and others of Martin Slaughter, for we find these men selling the books in question to the company at a later date... there is some reason to suppose that a few pieces may have been in Henslowe's hands ...²⁴

But one thing seems to be sure: once a play had been sold, "the script went through considerable revision, both in its presentation on the stage and in its later revivals" (Griswold 31). As Neil Carson points out, in *A Companion to Henslowe's Diary*:

The manuscript delivered to the players was rarely a finished product. Like the properties and costumes the actors acquired, a script had to meet certain theatrical specifications. When a doublet did not fit it was altered. When a dramatic manuscript proved unsatisfactory, all the evidence suggests that it was changed.... While most of the changes made to a dramatist's work were probably minor, nevertheless the progress of a script through the theatre from rehearsal to production involved continual modifications.²⁵

Kastan and Stallybrass similarly argue that "[t]he early quarto titles declare the text to which a play was inescapably a collaborative process, with the author by no means at the center of the collaboration."²⁶ Even Shakespeare was no exception. According to Orgel, although Shakespeare "Was not simply the playwright but also an actor and shareholder in the company--he was literally his own boss," yet he, as a matter of fact, "was simply in on more parts of the collaboration" (84).

IV. The Further Complication of Censorship

The very existence of censorship adds an other variable and further complicates the issue of play publication. It also poses great challenges to interpretation.

It is noteworthy, however, that the word "censorship" has various meanings. It usually refers to official constraint of any speech or publication believed to challenge the political, social, or moral order; but this naturally is a narrower definition of the term. Censorship, nevertheless, is never limited to what is defined above. What is more, the one who censors or creates restrictions can be the audience or readers, even the writers or artists themselves. Furthermore, the modes or methods of censorship might also have their historical, sociological, cultural, and even individual differences.²⁷

Forms of censorship came into being very soon after the introduction of printing to London in the late fifteenth century. The Tudors, beginning with Henry VIII, were only too mindful of the power and usefulness of the printed word and took every measure to ensure that opinion and discussion not be out of bounds.

The earliest proclamation against seditious and heretical works started in England under Henry VIII (1491-1547) in 1529. In 1538, another proclamation required that all English books be licensed by the Privy Council or its nominees. And, "the principle of prior censorship" was tightened in 1549, and again in 1551 and 1559.²⁸

In 1557, under Mary I (1516-1558), the Government took jurisdiction of the press by granting the official charter of incorporation to the Stationers' Company.²⁹ In 1559, this state-created monopoly was further confirmed by Elizabeth I (1533-1603). In addition, from that year, "no work might be printed by members of that Company until it had received the imprimatur of certain bishops or judges."³⁰

In 1560, the Stationers' Company was created as a livery

company, the members of which included such "stationers" as the booksellers, printers and bookbinders of London. Those members who wanted to have a book published first secured the exclusive right to the work by entering its title in a register and paying a fee to the Company. Under such circumstances, every play intended for publication was required to be registered by the Company. The virtual monopoly of publication by the Stationers' Company in this way was undoubtedly instrumental in the Government's press control.

In 1581, the commission of the Master of the Revels to license all plays imposed further regulatory restrictions on playwriting. If the close of all theatres in 1597 for the allegedly seditious and slanderous matter in *The Isle of Dogs* can be regarded as a noteworthy instance of this new stricture, the imprisonment of playwrights for the libelous references in *Eastward Ho!* in 1605 is another.

At the turn of the seventeenth century, when the Stationers' Company gradually lost its power to maintain a monopoly of printing, new suppressive expedients were adopted by the Authorities:

By Star Chamber decree, by Parliamentary ordinance, by statute, by proclamation, and by common law it was laid down that all books and papers printed by anyone not only must be registered by the Stationers' Company but must also be submitted to an official licenser. (Siebert 4)

And despite the fact that the Act of 1606 against profanity aimed mainly at the abuses of players on stage rather than those on page, a collation of such Folio texts as *Titus Andronicus*, *Richard III*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Henry IV, Part I*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Othello*, with their counterpart Quarto texts readily discloses "an expurgation of oaths, or the substitution of a secular oath for the religious oath printed in

the quarto".³¹ A striking example is that:

Falstaff's most frequently used epithet in *1 Henry IV*, 'By the Lord,' appears in Quarto 1 but has been systematically removed from the Folio text, and his and others 'oaths to 'God' in the Quarto have been altered to 'heaven' in the Folio. (Ioppolo 79)

And at least fifty oaths that appear in the Quarto edition of *Othello* are eliminated in the Folio. As a result of censorship, Frances A. Shirley even holds that it has reduced the tragic tension of the Folio text.³²

Political restriction might also account for some of the alterations or omissions found between the Quarto and Folio texts. In *Richard II*, for example, the deposition scene of Act IV, Scene 1 never appeared in the texts of the first Quarto (1597), the second Quarto (1598) and the third Quarto (1598), published during the reign of Queen Elizabeth.³³ The omission of several of the Fool's speeches in Act 1, Scene 4 of the Folio text of *King Lear* is also a notable instance.³⁴ Besides, both the change from Oldcastle of the first Quarto to Falstaff of later edition in *Henry IV*, Part I, and the change of Ford's assumed name from Brooke of the first Quarto to Broome of the First Folio in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* are generally thought to be influenced by censorship. In other Folio plays which an earlier edition is not available, there might have been numerous instances of not so apparent signs of expurgation.

"One of the ironies that define censorship as a paradox," wrote Michael Holquist, "is that it predictably creates sophisticated audiences."³⁵ In his view:

The reader of a text known to be censored cannot be naive, if only because the act of interdiction renders a text parabolic.... The ineluctably dual structure of the censored text, the simultaneity of a manifest and a

suppressed level of meaning, highlights the fatedness of interpretation, the shaping power of the interpreter's situation. (14)

Censorship thus provides "a particular kind of context" and "foregrounds the always present tension between text and context" (14).

What Holquist argued is, in a way, beyond dispute. Yet the reader, in fact, does not necessarily know whether the text he (or she) reads was censored. If the playwrights did internalize censorship during their process of playwriting, it is difficult for the reader to detect it. One thing, however, can be sure: those censored texts do create another great challenge to interpretation.

V. The Dimension of Textual Variations

In Chapter 6, "The Playwright's Share in *Hamlet*", Hapgood wrote, "The length of *Hamlet* is of its essence. It is Shakespeare's longest play, half again the length of an ordinary Elizabethan play. Productions which cut and trim the text are shirking the play's challenge," accordingly, he suggested, "For full effect the play should be done in its entirety--or its 'eternity' as the backstage joke goes" (127).

And in Chapter 11, "The Playwright and the Audience: The Outrageousness of *King Lear*" (236-55), Hapgood wrote that he recognizes the "integrities" of the Quarto and Folio texts of *King Lear*, but he also "believe[s] that the two texts are similar enough to permit a discussion which applies to both," and that "the overlap between the two" provides--for his purpose--"an 'essential *King Lear*'" (239).

Hapgood is not alone in holding such views. But what Hapgood and those who are sympathetic to these views tend to neglect is that, many of our arguments about "Shakespeare Studies," are in fact inherited from the vocabulary, concep-

tions, and assumptions of some eighteenth-century Shakespearean scholars.

For example, scholars' demands of the principle of authenticity of "Shakespeare's texts" and the currently prevailing conception of "the Shakespearean canon," in fact, never emerged until mid-eighteenth century. And it is only after the formation of such conceptions that the words of "Shakespeare's plays" gradually became sanctified. Yet it is important to note that the conception of "literary canons" does not indicate selection alone, it means hierarchies as well. The value of canons "derives not from any intrinsic properties but from the fact that they necessitate a continuous process of comparative placing and opposition."³⁶ "The Shakespearean canon" is actually not immutable; it varies with different perspectives or recognitions.

As we examine individual plays, we may also notice that both *Hamlet* and *King Lear* exist in three early printed versions. In *Hamlet*, we have the first Quarto (1603), the second Quarto (1604-5) and the First Folio (1623); each again differs in its length and content.

To think of a play as having one and only eternal and stable text not only neglects the fact that the existence of multiple versions of many "Shakespeare's plays" "is not merely common in the case of theatrical work, it is the rule,"³⁷ but also the fact that "a performance script," frequently modified or reworked, is actually different from "a play-text" (Foakes 86).³⁸

Moreover, no matter if it is "a *Hamlet* ... in its entirety" (Hapgood 127), "an 'essential *King Lear*'" (Hapgood 239), or what is usually called "a real Shakespeare's play," implicit in such discourses is a belief in the "integrity of the individual work," seeking to "[establish] an authoritative text," and to "[determine] what an author really wrote."³⁹ Such a belief in one interpretative authority, in fact, is a lament for an ideal, unique "lost play of Shakespeare." It is also a wrong

assumption that regards "Shakespeare the playwright" as the authority of interpretation. Yet, strictly speaking, as McGann puts it succinctly, "no single 'text' of a particular work--can be imagined or hypothesized as the 'correct' one" (62).

Besides, in a sense, we might even say that almost everyone involved in processing a play has some influence on the formation of the play text. The textual condition has become "a scene of contest and interaction, a scene where specific textual decisions are made (or unmade) in a context that involves many people. The actions of these persons, while always collective, are not always consciously or willfully cooperative" (McGann 60).⁴⁰ "[A]n unedited Shakespearean text," as a matter of fact, never exists.⁴¹ The instability and uncertainty of dramatic texts, not only call into question traditional conceptions and assumptions of authorship and authorial intention, but also make the authority and interpretation of a Shakespearean text extremely fascinating and challenging.

VI. Disembodied Voices

Hapgood opened his Chapter 5, entitled "The Playwright in the Play: *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Tempest*," by quoting the following remarks of Thornton Wilder:

It is the task of the dramatist so to coordinate his play, through the selection of episodes and speeches, that though he is himself not visible, his point of view and his governing intention will impose themselves on the spectator's attention, not as dogmatic assertion or motto, but as self-evident truth and inevitable deduction.
(61)

Such perspective similarly requires some rethinking. When we read a text, we are seeking to interpret what it

means. But traditional views hold that "the author" knew what s/he was doing,⁴² and that "the correct meaning" of the text is the one the author intended. Thus, scholars tend to explore the meaning of the text according to the author's intention. But this almost amounts to claiming that the authorial self has been formed prior to the composition of the work, and that the text can transmit the ideas of the playwright without creating any disruption.

The claim to locate the authorial presence in the text is in fact predicated upon a logocentric assumption, which misleadingly believes that language can represent a world "out there" without any distortion. This, however, is exactly what Roland Barthes opposed in his now well-known essay, "The Death of the Author." But, if "the text", as Roland Barthes indicates, "is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash",⁴³ then the attempt to find out the authorial intention is tantamount to "[imposing] a limit on the text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (Barthes 147). Thus we can see that the reader actually plays a significant role in the construction of the meanings of a text.

VII. Challenges and Opportunities

To reject the traditional model of the primacy of authorial intent, however, could become quite unsettling; at the same time, however, it could also open up important new doors of opportunity.

In an article entitled "Critical and Aesthetic Problems of Collaboration in Renaissance Drama", Cyrus Hoy argued that "[s]cholarly investigation of the authorial problems posed by collaborative drama is ... a necessary precondition to critical and aesthetic considerations of such drama."⁴⁴ With the disruption of the language, however, the author (or authors)

can no longer be thought of as a transcendental presence behind every word of "his/hers" (or "theirs"). The presence of the author (or authors) has become difficult to define. Indeed, as Lucille Kerr pointed out,

The revised critical vocabulary proposed by Barthes places the author in an apparently unoriginal position, where the one who writes is but the one who repeats, quotes, and filters the discourse of others. This shift in terminology would also propose that one reconsider the kind of authority that may be exercised by any author, that one shift one's thinking about the author as an authority.⁴

The rejection of essentialized identity of the author thus not only deprives the author of "individual identity" but also of "the role of creator" (Kerr 9). In short, the indeterminate nature of textuality simply renders the traditional assumption of "the author in the text" problematic. The author can no longer be regarded as either the originator of meaning or the authority of the text. At the same time, however, as Foucault suggests, despite these reconsiderations about writing, such notions as "work" and "writing" which were "intended to replace the privileged position of the author actually seem to preserve that privilege and suppress the real meaning of his disappearance" ("What Is an Author?" 143).

In addition, Foucault's discussion of the special properties of the author's name also draws our attention to the "author-function" of the name, and makes us realize that the author-function associated with the name is, in effect, "characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society" ("What is an Author?" 148).

Foucault's review of "the special properties of the author's name" also adds to the complexity of the textualized figure of

the author. On the one hand, according to Foucault, "the name of the author and, therefore, also the word author have a variety of meanings for our modern critical idiom, in which use of the term, as well as of authors' names, often brings together (and sometimes confounds) disparate senses" (Kerr 8). On the other hand, "the author's name, unlike other proper names, does not pass from the interior of a discourse to the real and exterior individual who produced it; instead, the name seems always to be present, making off the edges of the text, revealing, or at least characterizing, its mode of being' (147)" (Kerr 8).

Moreover, "[i]n its capacity as a description of a person and as a designation of an authorial function, that name may call up ... different meanings" (Kerr 8). The textuality of the author's name enable it to enter into a continual "dialogue" with other utterances or texts. The claim of the death of "the author" as person does not mean that we can also resist the return of the author. As Simon During argues,

On the one hand, Shakespeare becomes the effect, as against the originator, of his texts, a great deal of institutional power being invested in maintaining this distinction. On the other hand, however, strategies are devised for bringing Shakespeare the man back from the dead, to keep him alive in the culture--generally in a different cultural zone from criticism proper.⁶

Seen in this light, both the notions of presence and absence become operative ones. The nature of authorial identity also becomes something that is contingent, negotiated, and nonessential. No longer is "the author," as a concept, capable of being granted transcendent status. The author might have his/her authorial afterlife, but the posthumous presence of the author is necessarily a result of social, historical, economic, cultural, legal and political constructions.

Barthes proclaims "the death of the author," but to most readers, including Hapgood, "Shakespeare" remains present in "his" plays. Nevertheless, this "presence-in-absence" naturally is a textualized presence, resulting from the readers' contextualization as well as from institutional construction. By no means does it suggest an essentialized presence.

"[P]ost-Renaissance cultural institutions," according to Kastan and Stallybrass, "have tried to elevate 'art' above the contaminations of the market place and to construct a purified domain of the individual author that would be prior to the social relations of cultural production" (10). But in the case of "Shakespeare's plays," the assumption that the authority of these plays derives from Shakespeare is almost never true. This can be seen not only from above discussion of such aspects as collaboration, script ownership, censorship, and textual variations, but also from the impact of post-structuralism.

And yet, to most Shakespearean scholars, once breaking away from the authorial intention and the ultimate meaning of a work, how to reexplore the issue created by reading and interpretation means at once opportunities and challenges. Ostensibly, of course, scholars can put aside provisionally the way of reading that seeks authorial intention, seemingly acquiring greater freedom than ever. But, in effect, the shadow of "Shakespeare," even after his "death," would not be easy to turn away from. Moreover, how to choose an appropriate interpreting strategy, to advance a persuasive interpretation of the work, the text, the author(s), and other related socio-cultural phenomena, remains a great challenge, awaiting scholars' re-explorations and reinterpretations.

Notes

¹ A slightly different Chinese version of the article was published in *Chung Wai Literary Monthly* 24.3 (Aug 1995) 114-37. I would like to

thank my supervisor, Professor Stanley Wells, Director of The Shakespeare Institute, for his guidance of my project. I would also like to thank my good friend, Jaw-perng Wang, for his valuable discussions of some issues taken up in this paper; and my teachers, Professor Limin Chu and Professor Ching-hsi Perng, for their comments on an earlier Chinese version of this article.

² Robert Hapgood, *Shakespeare the Theatre-Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) vii. Cited hereafter in the text.

³ Of course, whether it is appropriate to designate the performance in traditional Oriental theatre "drama" is another controversial issue that deserves an inquiry of its own.

⁴ Simon Trussler, for example, points out in "Aspects of Collaborative Authorship," that "[c]ollaborative authorship was by no means unusual in the theatre of Shakespeare's day.... A great many of the plays written before 1590 appeared anonymously – just as the authorship of much medieval literature remains unknown – and many have been in part the product of 'collective creation' and of oral accretion" (See *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, ed Simon Trussler (London: Methuen, 1986) 8.

⁵ Scholarly works on the source-study of Shakespeare are too many to enumerate. Such works as Geoffrey Bullough's *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (London: Routledge & K. Paul; New York: Crowell, 1966), and Joseph Henry Satin's, *Shakespeare and His Sources* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966) are among the few well known to Shakespearean scholars.

⁶ Liang Shih-chiu, *The Eternal Theatre: Shakespeare* (Taipei: Shih-pao Wen-hua, 1983) 133. My translations. Cited hereafter in the text.

⁷ As pointed out by Sidney Lee in *A Life of William Shakespeare*, 3rd ed. (London: Smith, Elder, & Co, 1898): "One of the many crimes laid to the charge of the dramatist Robert Greene was that of fraudulently disposing of the same play to two companies. 'Ask the Queen's players,' his accuser bade him in Cuthbert Cony-Catcher's *Defence of Cony-Catching*, 1592, 'if you sold them not *Orlando Furioso* for twenty nobles [i.e. about 71.] and when they were in the country sold the same play to the Lord Admiral's men for as many more'"

(47).

⁸ J. Dover Wilson, "Malone and the Upstart Crow," *Shakespeare Survey* 4 (1951) 63.

⁹ Dennis Kay, for example, pointed out in *Shakespeare: His Life, Work and Era* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1992) that "though Chettle could argue that he was just doing a last duty for a friend by seeing his last words published, some scholars have, quite reasonably, questioned this. Some contemporaries even wondered if Nashe, with his genius for pastiche, might have been involved in the enterprise. Works by Chettle and Greene have been fed through computers to try to link the *Groatworth* with other writings by Chettle. The findings may be statistically inconclusive, but Greene wrote in many styles, and Chettle, if he wrote the *Groatworth*, would have been trying to imitate them. So we are not much further on" (165).

¹⁰ *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan (London and New York: Routledge, 1989) 143.

¹¹ It is important to note, however, that in 1616, the year when Shakespeare died, Jonson published his *Workes* in folio, in which, apart from two collections of his poetry, it also included nine plays and nineteen masques. Seven years later, thirty six "Shakespeare's plays" were published in folio by John Heminge and Henry Condell. These two events evidently would have modified the situation of play publication. See Rosalind Miles, *Ben Jonson: His Craft and Art* (Savage, Maryland: Barnes & Noble Books, 1990) 158.

¹² In fact, theatre historians still have difficulty in deciding, as Peter Thomson puts it in *Shakespeare's Professional Career* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), "whether Shakespeare was, from the start, a writer who found it necessary to act or an actor who discovered an ability to write" (27). According to Thomson, "[Shakespeare's] subsequent career is the best demonstration of the falsity of any absolute distinction between actor and playwright in an evolving professional theatre" (27).

¹³ Walter Wilson Greg, *Some Aspects and Problems of London Publishing Between 1550 and 1650* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956) 63. The Copyright Act mentioned here refers to the Statute of Anne. It

was not until 1710, with the passage of this statute, that authors became the beneficiaries of a copyright system. Yet it is important to note that "[a]lthough the Statute of Anne ostensibly provides for an author's copyright, the main beneficiaries were the booksellers, because the law made copyright assignable to others." See L. Ray Patterson and Stanley W. Lindberg, *The Nature of Copyright: A Law of Users' Rights* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1991) 28.

¹¹ Harold M. Otness, *The Shakespeare Folio Handbook and Census* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990) 12.

¹² From August to early October, 1597, Jonson was "comytted to prison" for his acting in and for part authorship of *The Isle of Dogs*, which contained some anti-Scottish references. Two other players also in jail because of this incidence were Robert Shaw and Gabriel Spencer.

¹³ They were imprisoned for libelous references in *Eastward Ho!*.

¹⁴ Christopher Marlowe and his collaborator and revisers, *Doctor Faustus: A- and B-Texts (1604, 1616)*, ed. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993) 70. Cited hereafter in the text.

¹⁵ Stephen Orgel, "What is a Text?" *Staging the Renaissance*, ed. David Scott Kastan and Peter Sallibrass (New York and London: Routledge, 1991) 87. Cited hereafter in the text.

¹⁶ Stanley Wells et al, *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) 618. Cited hereafter in the text.

¹⁷ *Pericles*, another play not included in the First Folio, is considered a "Shakespeare's play" and included by Peter Alexander in his edition of *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1951; New York: Random House, 1952).

¹⁸ Peter Reynolds, *Shakespeare: Text into Performance* (London: Penguin Books, 1990) 3.

¹⁹ Joan Holden in an interview by David Savran. See David Savran, *In Their Own Words* (New York: Theatre Communications Groups, 1988) 105.

²⁰ Wendy Griswold, for example, held a very similar assumption.

"The professional dramatist," wrote Griswold, "whether independent or attached by contract to a particular company, sold his script and all subsequent rights to the companies." See Griswold, *Renaissance Revivals* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986) 31. Cited hereafter in the text.

²¹ Walter Wilson Greg, *Henslowe's Diary*, II (London: A.H. Bullen, 1908) 119.

²² Neil Carson, *A Companion to Henslowe's Diary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 72.

²³ David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass, "Introduction," *Staging the Renaissance*, ed. Kastan and Stallybrass (New York and London: Routledge, 1991) 10. Cited hereafter in the text.

²⁴ For a detailed discussion please see Richard Burt, *Licensed by Authority: Ben Jonson and the Discourse of Censorship* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993).

²⁵ Henri-Jean Martin, *The History and Power of Writing*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994) 275.

²⁶ The Stationers' Company grew out of the fourteenth-century guild of university *stationarii*. It was chartered as a guild in London in 1403. The word *stationarii* refers to scribes and dealers in manuscripts.

²⁷ Fredrick Seaton Siebert, J.D., *The Rights and Privileges of the Press* (New York and London: D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc., 1934) 4. Cited hereafter in the text.

²⁸ Grace Ioppolo, *Revising Shakespeare* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991) 79. Cited hereafter in the text.

²⁹ Frances A. Shirley, *Swearing and Perjury in Shakespeare's Plays* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979) 110-24.

³⁰ Andrew Gurr, "Introduction," *King Richard II*, *The New Cambridge Shakespeare*, ed. Gurr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 9.

³¹ See Gary Taylor, "Monopolies, Show Trials, Disaster, and Invasion: *King Lear* and Censorship," *The Division of the Kingdoms*, eds. Taylor and Michael Warren (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983) 109.

See also Margot Heinemann, "Demystifying the Mystery of State': *King Lear* and the World Upside Down," *Shakespeare Survey* 44 (1992) 83.

³⁵ Michael Holquist, "Corrupt Originals: The Paradox of Censorship," *PMLA* 109.1 (January 1994) 14. Cited hereafter in the text.

³⁶ Janet Batsleer et al., *Rewriting English: Cultural Politics of Gender and Class* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985) 29.

³⁷ Jerome J. McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991) 74. Cited hereafter in the text.

³⁸ Although Hapgood mentioned in his footnotes the textual variations of *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, evidently he was not fully aware of the impact of the textual variations upon his arguments.

³⁹ Mark Rose, "The Author as Proprietor: Donaldson V. Becket and the Genealogy of Modern Authorship." *Of Authors and Origins: Essays on Copyright Law*, eds. Brad Sherman and Alain Strowel (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) 54.

⁴⁰ It is not my purpose in this article to enumerate or exhaust all the possible editorial interventions in the formation of "Shakespeare's plays." Even if I want to, it would be simply impossible to attain such a goal. But apart from such figures as collaborative playwrights, players, and the audience, other such figures or "functions" as scribes and composers naturally are among the important factors instrumental to the play's formation in Elizabethan-Jacobean time.

⁴¹ Jonathan Goldberg, "Textual Properties." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 37(1986) 214.

⁴² By the way, this "author" is usually in singular form in traditional discourses.

⁴³ Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text: Essays Selected and Translated by Stephen Heath* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1977) 146. Cited hereafter in the text.

⁴⁴ Cyrus Hoy, "Critical and Aesthetic Problems of Collaboration in Renaissance Drama" *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 19(1976)4.

⁴⁵ Lucille Kerr, *Reclaiming the Author: Figures and Fictions from*

Spanish America (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992)

7. Cited hereafter in the text.

⁶ Simon During, *Foucault and Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) 218.

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