PART I

Oral-memorial transmission and the formation of Shakespeare's texts

CHAPTER 1

The Elizabethan dramatic industry and industrious Shakespeare

> *Ingen. We shall have nothinge but pure Shakspeare and shreds of poetrie that he hath gathered at the theators.*
>
> Anon. 2 *Parnassus* (*c.* 1599) 3.1.986–7

> *Modern scientific bibliography began with the assumption that certain basic textual questions were capable of correct answers: that by developing rules of evidence and refining techniques of description and comparison the relation of editions of a work to each other and to the author's manuscript could be understood, and that an accurate text could thereby be produced. Behind these assumptions lies an even more basic one: that the correct text is the author's final manuscript … We assume in short that the authority of a text derives from the author. Self evident as it may appear, I suggest that this proposition is not true: in the case of renaissance dramatic texts it is almost never true.*
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> Stephen Orgel, 'What Is a Text?' (1981), p. 1.

Today, computers can help us map and quantify linguistic variation in the playtexts that survive from the early modern stage, including the plays that exist in multiple versions. Using large text corpora, search applications and statistical software, we can begin to assemble and test canon homogeneity on the basis of single lexemes, collocations or syntactical units, or combinations of these, but numbers representing stylistic features still mean little if we have no notion of how these features ended up in the texts. Similarly, a number of recent studies of the early modern playtext and its distribution on stage and in print (notably the work carried out by Andrew Gurr, Scott McMillin, Peter Blayney, David Bradley, Douglas Brooks, Tiffany Stern and Sonia Massai) have provided excellent stepping stones towards a better understanding of the industry in which Shakespeare worked. Yet theatre history seldom makes the leap into full-scale philology to relate cultural practices to the stylistic components of the individual surviving texts, just as important stylistic attribution

studies mostly fail to relate sufficiently to the historical context that surrounds the sample material. We are consequently left at a point where prominent theatre historians forget to relate cultural production to specific textual, linguistic, or structural facts and where attribution scholars neglect to question contextual conditions. It seems therefore that the most useful way to begin is to begin again. And so, in this chapter, we start by looking at the socio-historical context that enabled the production of the texts we use in textual scholarship as sample material. This, in turn, should allow us to establish a philological position, from which we can at least *begin* to evaluate whether there is an intrinsic connection between Elizabethan and early Jacobean playmaking practices and textual multiplicity.

Of the 600 or so English renaissance playtexts that survive today,[1] not all reflect the systematic methods of oral-memorial dissemination and the intense repertory system distinctive to the Elizabethan and partly the Jacobean dramatic industry. The texts that do, however, indicate that Shakespeare and his playwrighting contemporaries participated in an art form that was seldom, and perhaps never, wholly literary, unified or fixed. Today, whichever technology we apply, our only access to this form of entertainment is textual, a mode that is conventionally associated with literacy, stability and authority. However, when single plays survive in several different versions and types of text this sense of stability is severely relativised.

At least half of the plays currently attributed to William Shakespeare exist in more than one substantive version, as do a sizeable number of other popular plays from the period. This material fact applies to several plays written by the leading dramatists of the time. Not only do several closely related editions of single plays survive, but many plays coexist with earlier, more loosely connected renditions of similar story lines, or plots. There is also a significant number of playtexts which exist in seventeenth-century German derivatives, as well-established troupes of touring players brought versions of plays by Marlowe, Greene, Kyd, Peele, Shakespeare and Marston, to name but the examples we know about, across to the European continent to be performed in front of, in the beginning, mainly German-speaking audiences. These texts survive in print in variegated forms, some recorded in the seventeenth century and some later. These

[1] Andrew Gurr, 'Maximal and Minimal Texts: Shakespeare *v.* The Globe'. *Globe Research Bulletin* 4 (2000), pp. 1–25, at p. 17. Greg, following Fleay, calculated the extant number as 556 (between 1584 and 1642), suggesting a total production in this period of between 2,000 and 3,000 plays. See W. W Greg (ed.), *Henslowe's Diary.* 2 vols. London: A. H. Bullen, 1908, vol. 2, p. 146.

observations alone would begin to suggest that the surviving textual evidence is not necessarily best approached by conventional methodologies of literary analysis.

After the concerted efforts of the New Bibliography in the early twentieth century and the New Textualism of the 1990s to explain the fact of multi-textuality in the surviving early modern canons, scholarly interest in 'the text' and its physical historical context currently appears to have subsided. It would appear, moreover, that textual scholarship has thrown in the towel short of establishing a fully convincing argument for the theatrical/memorial provenance behind the shorter specimens of the multiple versions. The problems faced by scholars like Collier, Mommsen, Pollard, Alexander, Greg, Hart, Duthie and later Maguire therefore effectively still face us today, because, even though Greg and Maguire, *et al.* painstakingly list and discuss the verbal and structural phenomena in the so-called 'bad' or 'suspect' texts, their conclusions remain applied only to a subset of the surviving evidence, yielding potentially only half the answer. If, on the other hand, the verbal data gathered from these texts were to be correlated with the general vocabulary of all surviving playtexts, with so-called authentic and inauthentic texts included – something which is now a distinct possibility – we might be able to move closer to an explanation of some of the remaining problems concerning the provenance of the shorter editions. Meanwhile, we have seen a resurgence of scholarly interest in authorial aesthetics and the literary, or editorial, tradition behind the surviving early modern plays. One might say that the renewed interest in authorship has two branches. One branch is characterised by the work of scholars like Lukas Erne and Sonia Massai, who are concerned with a larger-than-textual argument to prove that from the 1590s, and potentially as early as the Tudor period, stage plays were written for a literary market also,[2] and that, moreover, the short quartos represent versions prepared for performance by literary-orientated revisers. The other, increasingly more dominant, branch of authorship studies is constituted by a renewed interest in the stylistic and linguistic aspects of authorship, and more particularly in the collaborative habits of playwrights, co-authorship, and the attribution of authorial style. This latter branch, headed by scholars such as Brian Vickers, MacDonald Jackson and Jonathan Hope, is significant

[2] Erne's argument; see Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Sonia Massai, in *Shakespeare and the Rise of the Editor*, begins her exploration of print culture and English vernacular drama in the Tudor period, and demonstrates the existence of an early practice of printed interludes in the vernacular, rooted in the Humanist tradition and concept of knowledge transmission.

because it offers, for the first time in years, a selection of defined and reproducible methodologies that can facilitate a genuine expansion of knowledge of Shakespeare's texts. Accordingly, a repository of reproducible stylistic data is now being produced, shared and applied as never before by a number of authorship and attribution scholars, many of whom co-operate with each other across academic institutions and geographic boundaries.

While Erne and Massai's, and to some extent Brian Vickers', accounts of early modern editorial culture confirm the existence of a market for printed (highbrow?) literature, the question remains to what extent the popular stage and the variegated products ensuing from it would have been dictated by these practices. My argument in this book is that the practices of oral-memorial dissemination remained influential far longer and far more fundamentally than the restrictions of a nascent print and editing culture could withstand. This is what the complex vocabularies of the surviving playtexts of the period would appear to indicate, and what this book will attempt to unveil. The playtexts evidently have a background both in literary (authorial) aesthetics *and* in non-literary modes of transmission, dependent on the skills and memories of actors, and the habits of compositors and scribes. But what we need to realise, and which possibly complicates matters even further, is that both authors and actors will have been subject to a third, commonly overlooked factor, namely 'tradition'. Tradition incorporates the number of prior and subsequent versions of the narrative that is being transmitted, placing the story at the centre of a complex reproductive system, where not only authors and performers are important, but also the stretch of time during which a story is performed, distributed and disseminated – orally *and* in manuscript or print. Critical interest in tradition has so far been minimal in early modern text and authorship studies. Douglas Bruster addresses the 'time factor' in his study *Quoting Shakespeare* (2000), but restricts his treatment of tradition to a preamble in a mostly theoretical study of intertextuality and new historicism applied to the works of Shakespeare, whereas tradition has received considerable attention in recent stylo-structural folklore studies.[3] Tradition, nonetheless, may prove to be one of if not the most significant stylistic missing link between 'what the author wrote' and 'what the actors spoke' in the plays produced by Shakespeare and his

[3] See e.g. John Miles Foley, *Oral-Formulaic Theory and Research: An Introduction and Annotated Bibliography*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1985; *The Theory of Oral Composition: History and Methodology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988; *The Singer of Tales in Performance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.

contemporaries. Where we stand at the moment, tradition is in fact the only factor that can feasibly account for the apparently very large pool of common, formulaic (rather than specific) vocabularic items present in both the so-called bad and the so-called good texts surviving in canons of the early modern stage.

To achieve anything like an authentic representation of Shakespearean playwrighting, the dimensions of 'literary', oral-memorial, and mechanical transmission have somehow to be merged, and the formal, functional contributions of authors, actors and tradition allocated stylistically within the texts. This means, candidly speaking, that the 'bad' texts ought to be studied as part and parcel of the 'good' editions, and vice versa.

As a cultural phenomenon, the early modern stage was an almost unique event in the history of popular entertainment in England. Positioned at the crossroads of the medieval, predominantly oral, performance arts of minstrelsy, mummings and mystery cycles, and an emerging modern entertainment industry, catering for the first time to a professional London theatre, as well as for the Court, the nobility and provincial citizens, the multiple-text cases are emblematic of a time and place where theatrical practices and conditions are best described as changeable, malleable and in flux. In this transitionary space between genuinely traditional live entertainment and literary drama, there is not yet a stable concept of what one might call an *accurate text*, but rather there are many versions and many kinds of text in circulation, filling *adequate* textual roles (artistic and practical; functional, social and political) in the traditions of individual plays. Such roles range from authors' manuscripts, which may have included both so-called 'foul' and 'fair papers' (about 18 such handwritten scripts survive,[4] one example being the co-authored 'booke' of *Sir Thomas More*), to company playbooks submitted to the Master of the Revels for licensing (compare the 'booke' of *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* and Massinger's autograph manuscript *Believe as You List*), via 'plots' or 'platts' and single parts[5] to versions

[4] Long counts 18 extant manuscripts, four of which appear to be exclusively in one playwright's hand (Massinger, Munday, Heywood). See William B. Long, '"Precious Few": English Manuscript Playbooks'. In *A Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. David Scott Kastan. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999, pp. 414–33.

[5] Both plots and parts have survived, though not for any Shakespeare play. Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern's *Shakespeare in Parts*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, offers reconstructed parts in the Shakespeare canon. The doctoral thesis of Nicola Gilmore, University of Gloucestershire, identifies similar cued parts in the Middleton canon (unpublished thesis, private correspondence). See also W. W. Greg, *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses*. 2 vols, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931, vol. 2 for the 'platts' of *Frederic and Baselia*, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, *The Battel of Alcazar*.

arguably abridged for touring and longer versions intended for yet other purposes and occasions. In this congregation of writing, memory and sound, originality, which the *OED* defines as 'primary or first-hand; authentic or genuine', becomes a very murky concept indeed. Perhaps the nature of an *allowed text* can be deduced from political *agenda* and remarks made by licensers,[6] but one soon finds that it is futile to look for such a thing as an intrinsically *original text* in the multitude of narrative and lyrical sources and already textualised versions of similar plot lines, which served as fair game for the jobbing dramatists and entertainers in the industry.[7] Some of these variegated incarnations fortunately reached print and thus momentarily crossed over into a literary, textualised, tradition; however, more often than not the plays remained oral and aural renditions of popular plots on the stages of the London playhouses, the Inns of Court; in provincial marketplaces, guildhalls, inns, courts, the universities and elsewhere.

If there is no stable definition for the early modern playtext, the renaissance dramatic industry appears to have had no accurate definition for 'the Author' either. The individuated dramatic text had been in existence in English since John Lydgate (*c.* 1370–1451),[8] but this fact had far from fixed the meaning or established the societal standing of the activity of authoring for performance. From a modern, and distinctly theoretical, vantage point, critics have offered various functional definitions of authorship, mainly from post-structural positions. Foucault, for example, agreed with Barthes that the 'Author' was dead, with the pertinent addition that the concept of the 'Author' was in fact a cultural construction that did not emerge before the seventeenth century. Thus Barthes succeeded in diminishing the rule and relevance of the individuated writer, but like the abstract labelling of text as 'multiple discourse' or 'web of quotations', the post-modern elimination of 'the Author' has perhaps been too readily adopted by renaissance scholars who have wished to add

[6] Gurr, 'Maximal Texts', pp. 1–21.

[7] Henslowe's diary charts the cash transactions for several plays and revivals on identical topics, e.g. Don Horatio, Julius Caesar, Troilus and Cressida, Harrey/Henry VI, King Leir/Lear, Richard III, King John, and Titus Andronicus/Titus and Vespacian. Alfred Harbage's *Annals of English Drama*, for 1559 to 1616, lists multiple stage plays on Dido, 'The Guise', Romeo and Juliet, Patient Grissel, Robin Goodfellow, Robin Hood, the Blind Beggar of Alexandria/Bednal Green, King Arthur, Palamon and Arcite, the Taming of a/the Shrew, the Rape of Lucrece, Nobody and Somebody, Sir John Oldcastle/Falstaff, Julius Caesar (Caesar's Fall/Caesar and Pompey), Timon, Titus, etc. See Greg (ed.), *Henslowe's Diary*, vol. 1, and Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama 975–1700*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1940, pp. 34–86.

[8] Seven dramatic texts by John Lydgate survive. See Stephen R. Reimer, 'The Lydgate Canon: A Project Description'. *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 5 (1990), pp. 248–9.

theoretical emphasis to simple historical conditions. As Douglas Bruster, and Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern so adequately demonstrate in studies like *Quoting Shakespeare* and *Shakespeare in Parts*, the early modern playtext was functionally composite and subject to cultural reconstruction long before someone thought of the term 'author function'. Thus when Jeffrey Masten submits that 'collaboration was the prevalent mode of textual production in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, only eventually displaced by the mode of singular authorship with which we are more familiar',[9] he is no doubt right, but is too willing to overlook the fact that the 'otherness' (collaboration) which he would make 'familiar' remains a historically determined phenomenon long before it becomes a post-modern reflection.

Neither Foucault nor Masten's arguments about authorial functions are satisfactory descriptions. They are not satisfactory in simple historical terms, nor indeed as a means of understanding what it meant to write for the early modern stage. In clear opposition to the post-modern position, Brian Vickers, in a lengthy discussion in his book *Shakespeare, Co-Author*, dismisses the late arrival (let alone death) of the author, tracing the direct succession of the individuated writer from classical Greco-Roman text culture to the Elizabethan dramatic industry.[10] This kind of rebuttal (which repudiates the historical accuracy value of at least Barthes' 'Author', if not Foucault's) is of course necessary for any kind of authorship study to take off: texts have authors. But how practically applicable is the Greco-Roman *auctor* model to Shakespearean playwrighting? Is it adequate and optimal to conceive of Shakespeare and his fellow playwrights *a priori* as individual artists in relation to individual works?

In *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* Lukas Erne proposes that William Shakespeare worked as a literary author, his activities closely linked with the evolution of literary status and authorship in the early modern period. Erne effectively suggests that Shakespeare, like Ben Jonson, wrote specifically to be read as a literary author, as well as for the stage. But if, as Erne recognises, the majority of playwrights wrote for various companies, each with their own 'play lists', and to various generic specifications, does he in fact provide sufficient textual evidence (from the surviving stylistic data) that the longer versions of Shakespeare's plays are *exclusively*

[9] Jeffrey K. Masten, *Textual Intercourse, Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 4.

[10] Brian Vickers, *Shakespeare, Co-Author, A Historical Study of Five Collaborative Plays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 3–43, and, particularly, Appendix II: 'Abolishing the Author?', pp. 506–41.

individual and literary? Even a comprehensive and well-founded study like *Co-Author*, which begins by stating that: 'no issue is more important than determining what he [Shakespeare] wrote',[11] and which is analytical in kind, linguistic in orientation and historical in outlook, nowhere asks whether the works at scholars' disposal (the surviving range of early modern playtexts) can actually facilitate the desired degree of determination of the authorship question. Why not ask more questions – or at the very least, be more sceptical of the sample material?

By means of external contemporary evidence we can easily establish that terms such as 'author', 'text', 'book' and even 'works' were in existence in Shakespeare's day.[12] It is also evident that classical literature (from Cicero and Seneca via Pliny to Juvenal and Plautus) impacted upon early modern English writers at large – from Wyatt, Sidney, Spenser and Bacon via Nashe, Kyd, Peele, Lodge and Marlowe to Munday and Daniel; Jonson, Ford and Marston, to mention but a few. It does not follow, however, that Shakespeare and his playwrighting colleagues of various backgrounds should, or could, work like their literary precursors and competitors. The terms 'stage-poet' and 'author' emerge only late in Elizabeth I's reign, alongside the more common, artisan-related terms 'playmaker' and 'playwright'. When the term 'author' *is* introduced into the theatrical industry, it is mainly promoted by Ben Jonson, who also keenly advocates terms like 'Drama' and 'dramatick.' Neither of the available names for the playwright of course vouchsafed any intellectual or aesthetic copyright until well into the seventeenth century, while legal or financial copyright is a much more recent phenomenon.[13]

Speaking of authorship, one cannot avoid discussing readership, the availability, demand and receptivity of which would presumably have influenced dramatic authorship in practice. It has long been suspected that Gabriel Harvey's comment about the 'wiser sort', who 'prefer his [*sic*] *Hamlet* and *Lucrece*' refers to readers reading texts/readers' reading-texts. One thing we can be sure of is that there was no shortage of printed texts when Harvey was writing. An unattributed 1591 pamphlet, *Martine Marsixtus*, for example, opens with the telling lines 'We live in a printing age'

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 10.

[12] According to *OED*, 'Book' (from OE *bōc*, possibly via *bec* = birch) is the oldest in use of the three, *c.* 800. 'Author' (from L. *auctor* = maker) only achieves its present *th*-form by *c.* 1550 (*aucthor* + var.), while the more abstract term 'text' (MedL *textus* = gospel/L. *textere* = to weave) arrives in English *c.* fourteenth century. The earliest 'works' recorded in Early English Books Online (EEBO: http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home) is *The warkis of the famous and worthie knicht Schir Dauid Lyndesay of the Mont, alias, Lyoun king of armes.* Edinburgh, 1580.

[13] See n. 42, p. 37, n. 39 below.