Introduction

This book may be seen as a sequel to *'Counterfeiting' Shakespeare: Evidence, Authorship, and John Ford's 'Funerall Elegye'* (Cambridge University Press, 2002). In that study I contested the recent ascription to Shakespeare of two poems, 'Shall I die?', made by Gary Taylor in 1985, and *A Funerall Elegye* for William Peter, made by Donald Foster in 1989. My case against Shakespeare's authorship of those poems has been generally accepted, and it is gratifying to learn that the *Elegye* will no longer appear in the one-volume editions which hurried to include it in the canon (the Norton Shakespeare, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al., the Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. B. Evans and J. M. Tobin, and the Longman Shakespeare, ed. David Bevington). The one-volume Oxford Shakespeare, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, in its second edition (Oxford, 2005), still includes 'Shall I die?', with no reference to the unanimously sceptical discussions it had provoked over the intervening twenty years, a strange rebuff to the notion of a scholarly consensus.

In the present study my task might seem much harder, to deny Shakespeare's authorship of *A Lover's Complaint*, which has been associated with his canon ever since Thomas Thorpe printed it with the *Sonnets* in 1609. However, as I show in chapter 1, Thorpe's record as a publisher who often obtained copy by dubious means, and got into trouble for claiming another printer's property, is not enough on its own to guarantee the authenticity of this work. The fact that Thorpe signed the dedication, as he did on several occasions when an author was 'absent', suggests that the *Sonnets* were printed without Shakespeare's knowledge. Thorpe had registered them with the Stationer's Company, the correct legal procedure once a publisher had got hold of a manuscript, the law then not requiring a publisher to secure an author's agreement. Thorpe's independence of Shakespeare in this matter does not call the authenticity of the *Sonnets* in question, which are wholly Shakespeare's work, but it cannot be used to guarantee his authorship of *A Lover's Complaint*, an extremely mediocre

poem which differs in every respect from Shakespeare's normal clarity and economy of composition.

Those who have ascribed it to Shakespeare have based their argument on isolated verbal parallels between the *Complaint* and his works, but have overlooked the many dissimilarities. Anyone who reads the poem attentively, without preconceptions as to Shakespeare's authorship, will be struck by its clumsiness and lack of invention. Many passages in the *Complaint* are irredeemably vague and confused, with ambiguities of grammar and syntax that we never find in Shakespeare. The diction is both highly Latinate and archaic; there are a large number of 'new' or strange words not found elsewhere in Shakespeare, some of them indeed never used by any other writer in English. There are many banal expressions which serve to fill up a verse line – 'high and low', 'wake and sleep', 'takes and leaves', 'wind and raine', and one piece of iambic padding, 'many a', which occurs no fewer than four times. The rhyme-word 'takes' has to do duty twice over in one stanza ('makes' / 'takes' / 'takes', 107–10), while four rhyme pairs occur twice within a short space: 'heart' / 'art' (142/5, 174–5), 'eies' / 'lies' (50/52, 288/90), 'eie' / 'flie' / 'eye' (247, 249, 251), and 'eye' / 'flye' (323/5), and 'grace' / 'place' (261/3, 316–18). The most blatant instance of recycling a rhyme is the pair 'find' / 'minde', which occurs three times within less than a hundred lines (88–9, 135/7, 184/7). Re-using a rhyme eleven times in a poem of 329 lines shows a paucity of invention not found in Shakespeare. But the most strikingly un-Shakespearian feature is the amount of inversion caused by the demands of metre or rhyme, which affects 149 of the 329 lines, more than 45 per cent of the whole. (For details of these anomalies see chapter 5.)

These are just some of the ways in which *A Lover's Complaint* falls below Shakespeare's normal inventiveness, and which have made me doubt his authorship since I first read it fifty years ago. Of course, there is a huge gap between judging a poem inauthentic and being able to produce a convincing counter-argument. It is only in the last eight years, while working on *'Counterfeiting' Shakespeare* and its companion volume, *Shakespeare, Co-Author: A Historical Study of Five Collaborative Plays* (Oxford University Press, 2002), that I have felt that I knew enough about the methodology of authorship studies to start examining *A Lover's Complaint* more closely. One personal problem I faced was that the two most convinced proponents of Shakespeare's authorship, Kenneth Muir (in 1964) and MacDonald Jackson (in 1965) were scholars I had long admired.[1] However, apart from a few inconclusive comments on metaphor, both

used just one stylistic marker, the co-occurrence of single words in the *Complaint* and in Shakespeare's vast *oeuvre*. It is a fundamental principle in authorship studies that a single stylistic marker is never sufficient to make a positive identification. All persuasive attributions in modern times have used several independent markers: when these all give the same result, there is a high probability that the correct author has been identified. (The cautious scholar never claims certainty.) An exemplary instance of this use of multiple criteria was given by MacDonald Jackson himself, in *Defining Shakespeare: 'Pericles' as Test Case* (Oxford, 2003), which synthesized the findings of many different approaches: vocabulary tests for rare words, word-echoes between Shakespeare plays, verbal parallels, metrical data (extra syllables, run-on lines, pause-patterns, rhyme, and assonance), high-frequency or 'function' words, and idiosyncrasies of grammar. All these independent tests produced the same result, identifying George Wilkins as the author of Acts 1 and 2 of *Pericles*, with Shakespeare writing Acts 3 to 5. Unfortunately, Professor Jackson did not draw on the same wide range of stylistic markers in examining *A Lover's Complaint*. In *Shakespeare, Co-Author* I brought together eighteen independent tests that had been used on *Titus Andronicus* since 1919, adding two of my own: all indicated that Act 1, and three other scenes (2.1; 2.2; 4.1) were non-Shakespearian, and can be ascribed to George Peele with a high degree of probability. A short narrative poem does not offer the same range of interpretation, but in chapter 5, 'A poem anatomized: the rival claims', I bring together several different kinds of evidence – vocabulary, word-formation, the use of rhetorical figures, metaphor, syntax, and rhyme – which will, I hope, convince readers that the *Complaint* was not written by Shakespeare.

But why do I propose John Davies of Hereford (1564/5–1618) as its author? His work disappeared from view soon after his death, and like many minor poets he has 'sunk without trace'.[2] Davies's name entered this arena in unusual circumstances, worth recalling. In 2003 MacDonald Jackson kindly sent me the typescript of an essay in which he repeated his case for Shakespeare's authorship, drawing on the newly available electronic database 'Literature Online', or LION (now maintained by ProQuest UK), an update of the Chadwyck-Healey collections of English poetry and drama (1995). Having searched this new and more complete resource for words and phrases, Jackson concluded that, according to his methodology, no other English dramatist of the period showed as many 'links' with the text of *A Lover's Complaint* as Shakespeare did. As I read this statement the thought occurred to me, 'why must the author of the

Complaint have been a dramatist? Why not a poet?' So I began searching the poetry database, starting with some of the acknowledged rare words in the poem. I typed in 'maunde' (a basket), and a number of poets were identified as having used it, including John Davies of Hereford. I then typed in 'forbod', and a smaller list of names appeared, also including Davies. Similarly with 'fell rage', 'particular' and 'affectedly' – for which LION records only two instances in Jacobean poetry, from the *Complaint* and Davies. The fact that Davies was the only Jacobean poet who had used all five words suggested that it might be fruitful to investigate his work, and so it has proved.

But I would not wish to give the impression that authorship attribution studies these days can be performed merely by doing electronic word-searches. Having been alerted to Davies as a possible candidate I spent several months reading and re-reading his works. It is my firm conviction that a first-hand reading experience of an author's work is the prerequisite for attribution studies. A scholar needs to know whole poems in order to understand the meaning or significance of a single line or a single word. Irony, sincerity, and other matters of tone or register can be evaluated only when you have grasped the author's intention as embodied in the work. The kind of detailed demonstration that I give in chapter 6 of the intersections between the language of *A Lover's Complaint* and the canon of John Davies, looking at rare words, common phrases, poetic diction, rhetorical figures, metaphor, and rhyme, can be performed only on the basis of an extensive reading knowledge. I have documented each of my quotations from Davies's work, using a short-title reference system explained in the Bibliography (p. 307), so that all my research can be replicated.

Having insisted on the primacy of reading, I have nonetheless been fortunate in having access to electronic resources which helped to confirm, or correct, something I had noticed in reading. I acknowledge my indebtness to LION, but also to two other invaluable resources. The CD-ROM issue of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition (1992; version 3.1, 2004) allows users to call up all the citations the Dictionary has taken from any author.[3] Thanks to this facility I was able to locate about 600 quotations from John Davies of Hereford in the *OED*, most of which were Latinisms, and many of which provided the sole entry, described as 'obsolete, archaic', the so-called 'nonce words' invented by him and used by no one else. In both cases Davies's usages provided striking generic similarities with the diction of *A Lover's Complaint*, as chapter 5 will show. By 'generic' I understand recurrent patterns of usage and word-formation,

linguistic habits which link the *Complaint* closely to Davies's work while differentiating it from Shakespeare's. In chapter 6 I complement that approach by instancing eighty specific parallels of thought and phrasing between Davies's poetry and the *Complaint*. In the final stages of documenting these intersections I was much assisted by an electronic software program called 'Concordance', developed by R. J. C. Watt.[4] This ingenious tool allows users various search possibilities, checking word frequencies, word-endings, and collocations; with it I was able to trace additional instances of specific parallels that I had noted in my reading.

The case against Shakespeare, and for Davies, is made in the book's second part, or 'Foreground'. The first part, or 'Background', attempts to answer the question several friends put to me, 'Who was John Davies of Hereford? And why have we not heard of him before?' In chapter 2 I briefly reconstruct his 'life of writing', a phrase which I use in two senses: he was a distinguished calligrapher, chosen to copy the Sidney *Psalms* to be presented to Queen Elizabeth, and he was the leading handwriting teacher in Britain, whose pupils included Prince Henry. But he was also a poet, who published twelve volumes of verse between 1602 and 1617, was known to many literary figures of the day, and seems to have had a special relationship with Shakespeare's company, the King's Men. He addressed a poem to Shakespeare, 'our English Terence', referred to him several times elsewhere, while Shakespeare echoed his poem *Microcosmos* in both *Macbeth* and the *Sonnets*. Davies's range as a poet was wide, his many voices including didactic philosophical-theological verse, scabrous satire, love sonnets, devotional poetry, and allegory. His ability to imitate other poets' voices as easily as he could write many different hands, was exceptional, and makes it impossible to define his own 'normal' verse style. His most revered model was Spenser, whom he imitated throughout his career, and in chapter 3 I document the predominantly Spenserian nature of the *Complaint*'s setting and language. These features, which no advocate of Shakespeare's authorship has acknowledged as counter-evidence, again bring the poem close to Davies while distancing it from Shakespeare, who never showed any inclination to imitate Spenserian archaicisms.

The following chapter, 'Poore women's faults', reconstructs the 'Female Complaint' poetic tradition through its two most distinguished exemplars, Daniel's *The Complaint of Rosamond* and Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece*. John Kerrigan seemed to be about this task in his anthology, *Motives of Woe* (Oxford, 1991), which has the subtitle *Shakespeare and 'Female*

Complaint'. However, strangely enough, he neither included *Lucrece* as a text nor discussed it in his Introduction.[5] Nor did he offer any sustained analysis of the *Complaint* in terms of its predecessors. My account shows that the author of *A Lover's Complaint* knew both *Rosamond* and *Lucrece* well, but that he differed from them in several surprising ways. He presented a heroine who is not remorseful for her fallen state, who continues to flout ethical norms by praising the power of desire over reason and judgement, and who is still so infatuated with her seducer, despite all she has suffered, that she would willingly renew the relationship. The poem is in effect an indictment of female sexuality and an attack on the pleasure principle, simultaneously moralizing and misogynistic. Both attitudes are found throughout Davies's work, but not in Shakespeare's.

I hope to have settled the authorship of *A Lover's Complaint* once and for all, by combining contextual studies of genre, socio-ethical attitudes, and language, considered from several different aspects. I expect to see this spurious poem removed from the canon where it has been allowed to nest for four centuries.

CHAPTER I

Thomas Thorpe and the 1609 *Sonnets*

What unapproved witness doost thou beare!

(*LC*, 53)

The Stationers' Register for 20 May 1609 carried this entry

> Tho. Thorpe. Entred for his copie under the handes of master Wilson and master Lownes Warden a book called Shakespeares sonnettes
>
> vjd.

When published later that summer, 'By G. Eld for T. T. and are to be solde by *William Aspley*', the volume of SHAKE-SPEARES SONNETS had acquired an additional poem not mentioned in the Stationers' Register, and that poem had acquired an author: 'A Lovers complaint. /BY/ WILLIAM SHAKE-SPEARE' (Sig. KIV). The forty-seven stanzas of this poem conveniently fill the book's eleven remaining pages. The printer, George Eld, was a regular associate of the stationer Thomas Thorpe, with whom he produced over twenty books.[1] Thorpe had registered his ownership of the manuscript with the Stationers' Company, although there is no way of telling how he acquired the 'copy' of either the *Sonnets* or of *A Lover's Complaint*. The dedication of the *Sonnets* is a much reproduced document:

TO.THE.ONLIE.BEGETTER.OF.
THESE. INSVING.SONNETS.
M^R. W. H. ALL.HAPPINESSE.
AND.THAT.ETERNITIE.
PROMISED.
BY.
OVR.EVER-LIVING.POET.
WISHETH.
THE.WELL-WISHING.

ADVENTVRER.IN.
SETTING.
FORTH.
T. T.

Usually, book dedications in this period were signed by the author, and often provide valuable information about the author's intentions and the mechanisms of patronage.[2] The fact that Thorpe, the publisher (as we would call him) signed this dedication rather than the author, suggests that the book was printed without Shakespeare's permission. His two previously published poems, *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594), were both dedicated to Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, and signed 'William Shakespeare'. Thorpe, however, dedicated this volume to its 'ONLIE. BEGETTER', a metaphor which has produced much discussion, wishing 'M^{R}. W. H. ALL.HAPPINESSE'. Of the legion interpretations of these words, I incline to the one recently revived by Robert Fleissner,[3] according to which 'begetter' means 'the person who procured the manuscript', namely 'M^{R}.W.HALL', a visual pun of a kind that Thorpe used elsewhere.

Setting aside further discussion of the dedication, the relevant point is that Thorpe was responsible for publishing this volume, and it was Thorpe alone who claimed *A Lover's Complaint* for Shakespeare. No other evidence links Shakespeare to the poem.

The key issue, then, is whether or not Thorpe's word can be trusted. Thorpe's publications between 1605 and 1608 included some carefully printed texts of plays by Chapman, Jonson, and Marston, ending with the anonymous *Histriomastix* (1610). Thereafter he published theological and travel books, including John Healey's translations of *St Augustine of the Citie of God* (1610) and *Epictetus Manuell* (1610). However, Thorpe also took part in at least three dubious publishing enterprises, two of which involved George Eld. Thorpe's first entry in the Stationers' Register was of 'a panegyric or congratulation' to James I, entered on 23 June 1603; but the entry was subsequently cancelled since the poem had already been registered to 'Master Seaton' – that is, Gregory Seton. As Colin Burrow observed, although Elizabethan publishing conventions were more fluid than ours, Thorpe had violated 'one of the key principles of the Stationers' company', that each printer's copy rights should be preserved.[4] Previously, in 1600, Thorpe had been involved in issuing the second edition of Marlowe's translation of *Lucans First Booke*, to which he contributed an epistle flaunting the fact that he had acquired the manuscript from Edward Blount. The circumstances behind this 'apparent piracy',

as Burrow described it, are unclear, but W. W. Greg argued that Thorpe's florid and quipping epistle to Blount was in fact 'intended for bitter sarcasm', containing phrases 'deliberately meant to wound', and can be read as 'an invasion by Thorpe of what he pretends to be Blount's claim to all Marlowe's literary remains'.[5] Burrow endorsed Greg's suspicions, and pointed out that Thorpe undoubtedly did not own the copy for *The Odcombian Banquet* (1611), which the *Short-Title Catalogue* describes as 'largely a pirated reprint of the prelims of' *Coryats Crudities* (1611): as such it may have been more than a mere 'prank', as Katherine Duncan-Jones excused it (Duncan-Jones 1997, p. 155).

The preliminary pages to *Coryats Crudities* consist of a huge gathering of testimonies to the eccentric traveller Thomas Coryat, prose eulogies and a 'Character' of Coryat, poems in English, Welsh, Latin, Spanish, Italian, and French, by a distinguished group of friends or acquaintances who entered into the spirit of mock-scholarly panegyric. They include Ben Jonson (two poems), John Harington, Dudley Digges, John Donne, Hugh Holland, John Hoskyns, Lionel Cranfield, Thomas Campion, John Owen, Michael Drayton, John Davies of Hereford, and Henry Peacham. By reprinting all these contributions in *The Odcombian Banquet*, at his own cost, Thorpe was clearly looking to cash in on Coryat's fleeting celebrity, and on the final page he added a mocking farewell, beginning with the legal phrase *Noverint universi*, &c:

> know (gentle Reader) that the booke, in prayse whereof all these preceding verses were written, is purposely omitted for thine, and thy purses good: partly for the greatnes of the volume, containing 654 pages, each page 36 lines, each line 48 letters, besides Panegyrickes, Poems, Epistles, Prefaces, Letters, Orations, fragments, posthumes, with the comma's, colons, full-points, and other things thereunto appertaining: which beeing printed of a Character legible without spectacles, would have caused the Booke much to exceed that price, whereat men in these witty dayes value such stuff . . . (Sig. P4v)

Thorpe claims to have 'read the booke with an intent to epitomize it', hoping to 'have melted out of the whole lumpe so much matter worthy the reading, as would have filled foure pages': but found the task impossible. This dismissive epistle adds insult to injury, just as Thorpe had done when he acquired Marlowe's Lucan from Blount, as if he enjoyed flaunting the fact of having acquired copy rightly belonging to someone else, whether an author or a printer. In 1613 Thorpe took part in another satiric attack on Coryat, entering in the Stationers' Register on 2 August a poem by John Taylor the Water-Poet called *The eighth wonder of the world, or Coriats escape from his supposed drowning. With his entertainment at Constantinople.*

To complete the prank, Thorpe added a fictitious place of publication: 'Pancridge'.[6] The following year, when Thorpe issued the translation of Lucan's *Pharsalia* by Sir Arthur Gorges, Burrow noted, 'questions about the origins of the copy are deliberately raised in the preliminary matter: the preface, purportedly by Gorges's son Carew, who was then only ten, states that he stumbled on the poem "in my fathers study, amongst many other of his Manuscripts" (Sig. A3v) and arranged with his schoolmaster to have it printed'. In addition, the fact that 'other sonnet-sequences . . . usually only have dedications by their printers in cases where piracy is clear or suspected',[7] means that Thorpe's inclusion of *A Lover's Complaint* cannot be complacently regarded as guaranteeing its authenticity.

George Eld was Thorpe's partner in the Coryat piracy of 1611, as he had been for the *Sonnets* and the *Complaint* in 1609. Like Thorpe, Eld brought out several plays legitimately, but in 1607 he described *The Revenger's Tragedy* on its title page as belonging to the King's Men, and he published *The Puritan* (now known to be Middleton's) as by 'W. S.'. In his study of Eld's career David Frost pointed out that between 1606 and 1608 he expanded his activities, entering many works in the Stationers' Register, and was evidently trying to become a publisher, not just a printer. As such, 'Eld needed bestsellers', which would explain his 'sharp practice' in attributing '*The Puritan*, not indeed to the King's Men, but to their leading dramatist, one "W. S."'.[8] MacDonald Jackson endorsed Frost's suggestion that Eld may have deliberately attributed *The Revenger's Tragedy* to the leading company of the day, and added: 'Eld's use of the initials "W. S." on the title page of *The Puritan* was almost certainly intended to mislead.'[9] There is abundant evidence that Shakespeare's name had sufficient kudos by the late 1590s for publishers to think of the cash benefits that might accrue from ascribing not only plays but apocryphal poems to him.[10] The most notorious of these mis-attributions took place in 1612, for on 13 February the Stationers' Register recorded the following entry:

> Thomas Thorpe. Entred for his copy under th' [h]andes of the wardens. A booke to be printed when it is further authorized called, *A funerall Elegye* in memory of the late virtuous master WILLIAM PEETER of Whipton neere Exetour . . . vjd[11]

When the poem was published, Thorpe's name was not included on the title page (perhaps implying that it was issued privately), which only names his regular printer: 'Imprinted at London by G. Eld'. But in the