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978-1-107-02965-1 - Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist: Second Edition

Lukas Erne

Excerpt

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Introduction

In a letter appended to his *Apology for Actors* (1612), Thomas Heywood allows us a rare glimpse of Shakespeare's inner life. In the third edition of a miscellany called *The Passionate Pilgrim*, which had been published earlier the same year, the printer William Jaggard had added certain pieces from Heywood's *Troia Britannica* (1608) to the poems present in the first two editions. Yet, far from acknowledging Heywood's authorship, the title page describes the collection as "newly corrected and augmented. By W. Shakespeare." Shakespeare does not seem to have been amused. He was, Heywood tells us, "much offended with M. Jaggard (that altogether vnknowne to him) presumed to make so bold with his name."¹ Shakespeare may well have taken the matter further. Of the two extant copies of the 1612 *Passionate Pilgrim*, only one bears Shakespeare's name on the title page, while the other copy omits it. Shakespeare's displeasure seems to have been

¹ Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors* (London, 1612), G4^v. Heywood's letter has often been misunderstood and deserves to be quoted at some length:

Here likewise, I must necessarily insert a manifest iniury done me in that worke, by taking the two Epistles of *Paris to Helen*, and *Helen to Paris*, and printing them in a lesse volume, vnder the name of another, which may put the world in opinion I might steale them from him; and hee to doe himselfe right, hath since published them in his owne name: but as I must acknowledge my lines not worthy his [Shakespeare's] patronage, vnder whom he [Jaggard] hath publisht them, so the Author [Shakespeare] I know much offended with M. Jaggard (that altogether vnknowne to him) presumed to make so bold with his name. (G4^{r-v})

Heywood had first published the said Epistles in his *Troia Britannica* of 1608. Since they appeared in 1612 in a volume ascribed to Shakespeare, Heywood is worried that readers will mistakenly assume that these Epistles had been unrightfully included in Heywood's earlier volume. A further mistaken inference, Heywood fears, would be that their real author, Shakespeare, "to doe himselfe right," included them in his *Passionate Pilgrim* in 1612. As *The Passionate Pilgrim* contains Shakespeare's Sonnets 138 and 144, several scholars who failed to recognize that the phrase "and hee to doe himselfe right, hath since published them in his owne name" is syntactically subordinated to "may put the world in opinion," have mistakenly believed that Heywood is referring to Shakespeare's publication of his sonnets in 1609. See, for instance, Katherine Duncan-Jones, ed., *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, The Arden Shakespeare (Walton-on-Thames, Surrey: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 2–3.

such that he requested a new title page for the unsold copies, from which Jaggard removed his name (see Figures 1 and 2).²

This incident presents us with a picture of an unfamiliar Shakespeare: keenly aware of what is and what is not his literary property, concerned about his reputation, proud of his name and unwilling to have it associated with lines that did not flow from his pen. The Shakespeare we are familiar with is in many ways a different figure. Building upon his article for the *Dictionary of National Biography*, Sidney Lee, in his influential biography, was instrumental in promoting the image of a Shakespeare unconscious of the quality of his work and largely uninterested in it beyond its “serving the prosaic end of providing permanently for himself and his daughters.”³ Many biographies have followed since, and few have entirely endorsed Lee’s portrait of Shakespeare as a money grabber. Yet what has remained largely unchanged in our view of Shakespeare is that he allegedly had little interest in his writings as personal property and even less interest in posterity.

How inconsistent is the picture of the “much offended” Shakespeare we glimpsed above with what we gather about Shakespeare at other moments of his artistic career? Robert Greene’s attack on Shakespeare in *Greene’s Groatsworth of Wit* is well known: having given some advice to three of his fellow playwrights (probably Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Nashe, and George Peele), he goes on to warn them against an

upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tyggers hart wrapt in a Players hyde*, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you: and beeing an absolute *Johannes fac totum*, is in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a countrey.⁴

It is possible, of course, to dismiss Greene’s attack as symptomatic of his jealousy and therefore hopelessly biased. It would admittedly be foolish to argue that Greene is an altogether fair and disinterested commentator. Nevertheless, the passage may be of greater interest for what it tells us about the object of the attack than about the attacker. As early as 1592, Shakespeare had done enough to awaken a rival playwright’s jealousy. He was well advanced in the first tetralogy, the most ambitious project the

² See Samuel Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare: A Compact Documentary Life*, rev. edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 271. For a facsimile edition of the 1612 *Passionate Pilgrim* with an excellent introduction, see *The Passionate Pilgrim*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins (New York and London: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1940).

³ Sidney Lee, *A Life of William Shakespeare* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1898), 279.

⁴ I quote from D. Allen Carroll’s edition, *Greene’s Groatsworth of Wit, Bought with a Million of Repentance (1592)*, *Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies*, 114 (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1994), lines 939–43.

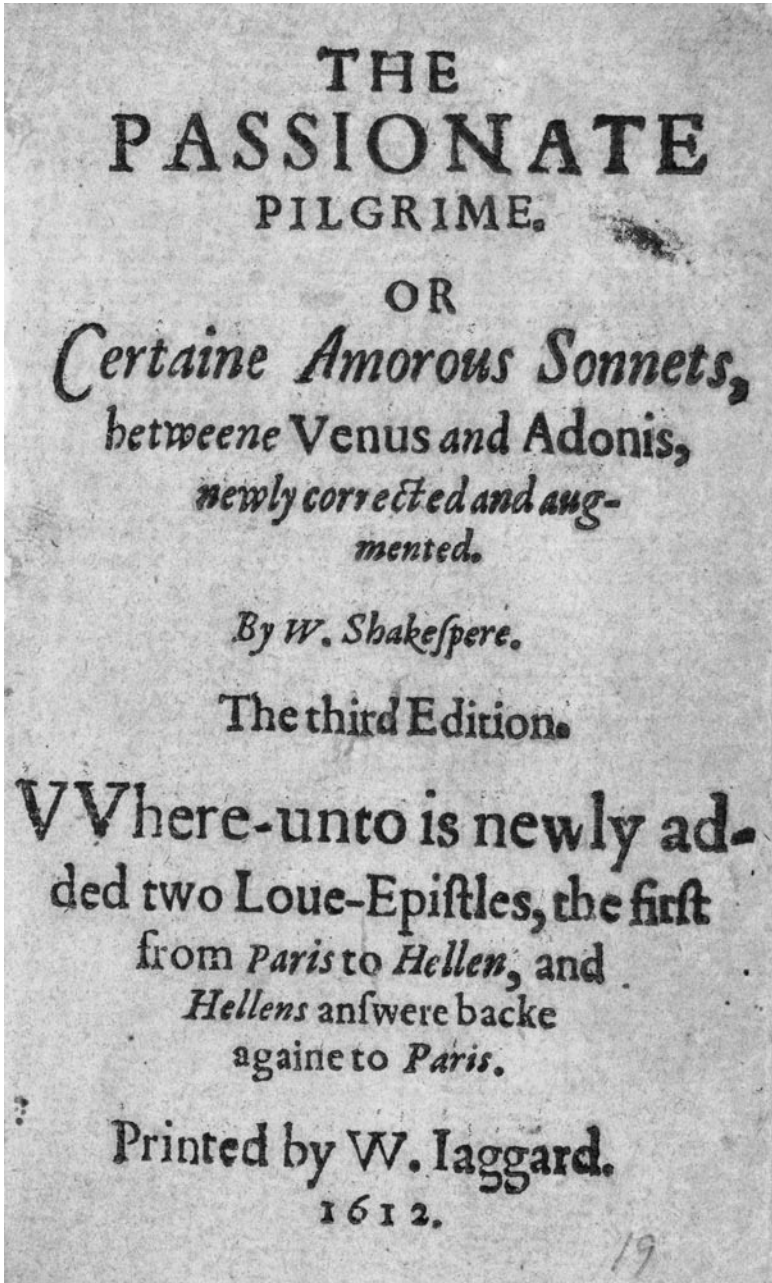


Figure 1. Title page of the third octavo edition of *The Passionate Pilgrim*, 1612 (STC 22343), attributed to Shakespeare.

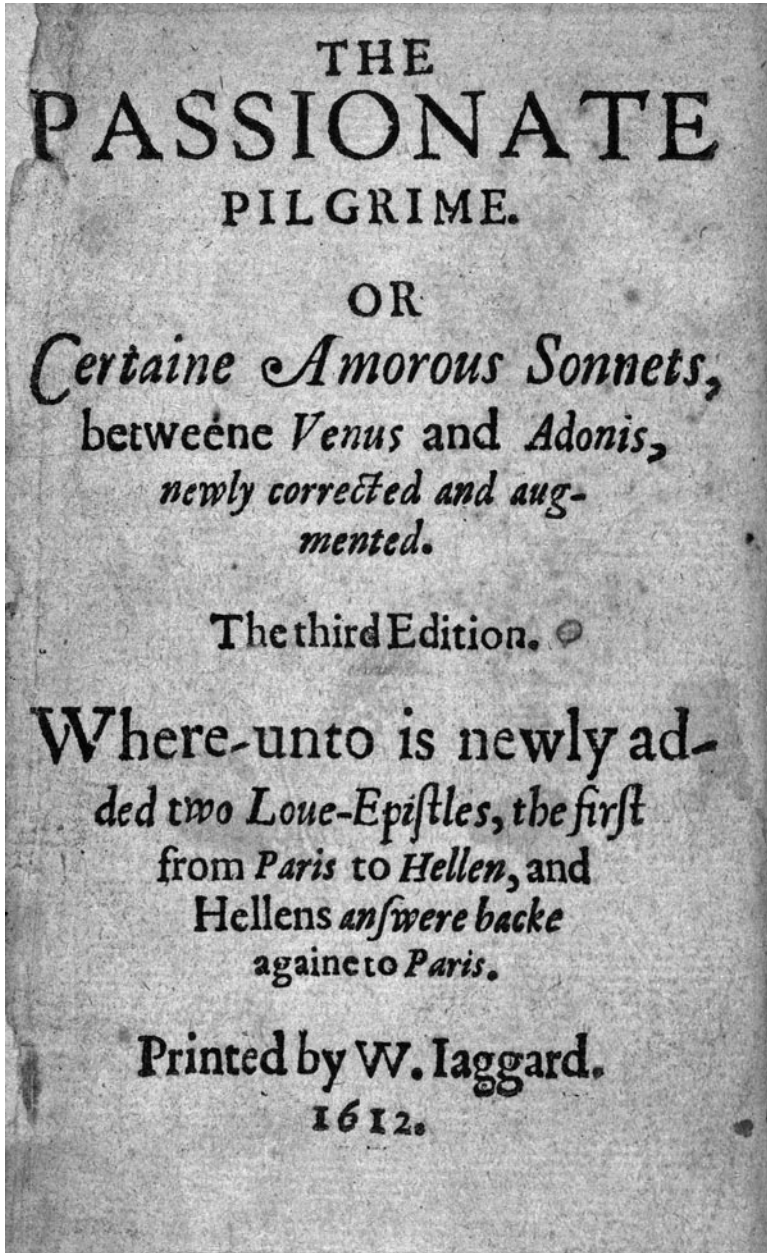


Figure 2. Cancel title page of the third octavo edition of *The Passionate Pilgrim*, 1612 (STC 22343), with no authorship attribution.

professional stage had yet seen, which was to find its completion soon after with *Richard III*.⁵ Significantly, attributing to Shakespeare a “*Tyggers hart wrapt in a Players hyde*,” Greene not only accuses Shakespeare of duplicity but simultaneously alludes to a line in 3 *Henry VI*, probably the most recent product of Shakespeare’s ambitious project. Marlowe had written a two-part play and so, it seems, had Thomas Kyd.⁶ A mere player (as opposed to Greene and other university-trained gentlemen), not yet thirty years of age and still relatively new among London’s playwrights, Shakespeare was not content to follow their precedent but seems to have been eager to outdo them. Shakespeare, Greene has it, “is in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a countrey.” There is no way of knowing how justified Greene’s punning allusion to Shakespeare’s alleged conceitedness was, but what we know about Shakespeare’s dramatic writings at the time does suggest a fair amount of artistic ambition and self-consciousness.

Some time between Greene’s attack in 1592 and Heywood’s letter in 1612, Shakespeare must have written his sonnets. No reader can ignore how prominently the theme of poetry as immortalization figures in them. In fact, no fewer than twenty-eight sonnets deal with this topic.⁷ Sonnet 74 will serve as an example:

But be contented when that fell arrest
Without all bail shall carry me away.
My life hath in this line some interest,
Which for memorial still with thee shall stay.
When thou reviewest this, thou dost review
The very part was consecrate to thee.
The earth can have but earth, which is his due;
My spirit is thine, the better part of me.
So then thou hast but lost the dregs of life,
The prey of worms, my body being dead,
The coward conquest of a wretch’s knife,
Too base of thee to be rememberèd.
The worth of that is that which it contains,
And that is this, and this with thee remains.

⁵ Note, however, that not all scholars agree today that the three parts of *Henry VI* were written by Shakespeare alone. See below, page 217.

⁶ See Lukas Erne, “Enter the Ghost of Andrea: Recovering Thomas Kyd’s Two-Part Play,” *English Literary Renaissance*, 30 (2000), 339–72, rpt. and rev. in *Beyond “The Spanish Tragedy”: A Study of the Works of Thomas Kyd*, Revels Plays Companion Library (Manchester University Press, 2001), 14–46.

⁷ J. B. Leishman, *Themes and Variations in Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (London: Hutchinson, 1961), 21–22. Sonnet 74 and, unless stated otherwise, all following quotations are from Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, gen. eds., *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

Introduction

31

The poem sharply distinguishes between “that” (the perishable body) and “this” (the poetry we are reading), poetry being “the better part of me” which survives after death. J. B. Leishman rightly pointed out that Shakespeare’s repeated insistence on his writings as that which will transcend his mortal existence (“My life hath in this line some interest”) is not easily squared with his alleged indifference to the afterlife of his writings: “so far as I am aware, no writer on the Sonnets has remarked upon the fact that [Shakespeare], who is commonly supposed to have been indifferent to literary fame and perhaps only dimly aware of the magnitude of his own poetic genius, has written both more copiously and more memorably on this topic [i.e. poetry as immortalization] than any other sonneteer.”⁸ It is true, of course, that others had voiced similar ideas before Shakespeare. In Sonnet 69 of his *Amoretti*, Edmund Spenser writes that “this verse vowd to eternity” is an “immortall monument.”⁹ Elsewhere, Michael Drayton speaks of “my World-out-wearing Rimes.”¹⁰ More examples could be given, going all the way back to Ovid.¹¹ Yet Leishman counters the objection that Shakespeare was simply drawing upon a well-known *topos*: “It seems to be generally assumed, in a vague sort of way, that most, perhaps all, sonneteers, English, French and Italian, perhaps even from Petrarch onwards, had written a great deal about their own poetry, and that Shakespeare was merely saying the sort of things they had said, but saying them better: this . . . is far from the truth.”¹² Leishman suggests that, in his sonnets, Shakespeare, more than any of his predecessors or contemporaries, seems to have been obsessed with the transcendence of his own poetry.

Toward the end of the sixteenth century, an English poet’s hopes that his verse would live on after his death were probably more likely to come true than ever before. More than a century after William Caxton had established the first printing press in England, print had become widespread. Elizabethan England was in many ways “a printing age” in which “reading was no longer the prerogative of a few.”¹³ In the last two decades of

⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁹ Lines 9–10. I quote from *Edmund Spenser’s Amoretti and Epithalamion: A Critical Edition*, ed. Kenneth J. Larsen (Tempe, Ariz: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1997), 96.

¹⁰ Line 7, Sonnet 44 (in the final order first printed 1599) in *Idea’s Mirror*. I quote from *The Works of Michael Drayton*, ed. J. William Hebel, corr. edn, 5 vols. (Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press, 1961), II, 332.

¹¹ See, for instance, Laurie E. Maguire, “Composition/Decomposition: Singular Shakespeare and the Death of the Author,” in *The Renaissance Text: Theory, Editing, Textuality*, ed. Andrew Murphy (Manchester University Press, 2000), 135–53, and Leishman’s study.

¹² Leishman, *Themes and Variations*, 22.

¹³ H. S. Bennett, *English Books & Readers, 1558 to 1603* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1965), 2, 4. For the impact of print on early modern culture, see Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe*, 2 vols.

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the sixteenth century, an average of about 280 titles per year were published in England.¹⁴ While the output of what we now call “literature” remained below that of religious texts throughout the sixteenth century, the number of literary titles was increasing and reached more than a quarter of the total output by the end of the century. The years 1500 and 1550 saw the publication of fourteen and twenty-one “literary” titles respectively, but no fewer than eighty-four of them were published in the year 1600.¹⁵ By the time Shakespeare started writing poetry and plays, the printing press had made the creation and perpetuation of literary fame a distinct possibility.

It is one of the great paradoxes of English literary history that even though print had become an agent of greatest importance in the construction of literary reputation by the late sixteenth and the early seventeenth century, scholarship has long taught us that Shakespeare and many of his contemporary dramatists remained largely unaffected by these developments. Writing about Shakespeare and his contemporaries in the theatrical world, Andrew Gurr only perpetuates what others said before him when holding that “Except for a few poets, nobody gave a thought to posterity.”¹⁶ Julie Stone Peters has pertinently identified this widespread belief as “One of those lies so convenient to the history of progress: that Renaissance dramatists were unconcerned with the circulation of their work on the page; that the press kept aloof from the stage and the early stage kept aloof from the press.” Her impressive study shows that, on the contrary, in England as well as in the rest of Western Europe, the institutions of the printing press and the modern theater “grew up together.” Whereas a performance critic like William Worthen believes that “Shakespeare’s works were perhaps not viewed as textual in his era,”¹⁷ Peters amply demonstrates that, by the end of the sixteenth century,

(Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450–1800*, trans. David Gerard, eds. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and David Wootton (London: NLB, 1976); Roger Chartier, *Cultural Uses of Print*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Princeton University Press, 1987) and “Texts, Printing, Reading,” in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 154–75; and Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

¹⁴ I owe this figure to the website at <http://cbsr26.ucr.edu/ESTCStatistics.html>, which presents “Some Statistics on the Number of Surviving Printed Titles for Great Britain and Dependencies from the Beginnings of Print in England to the year 1800,” by Alain Veylit.

¹⁵ Edith L. Klotz, “A Subject Analysis of English Imprints for Every Tenth Year from 1480 to 1640,” *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 1 (1937–38), 417–19, 418.

¹⁶ Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage 1574–1642*, 3rd edn (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 46.

¹⁷ William B. Worthen, “Drama, Performativity, and Performance,” *PMLA*, 113 (1998), 1093–107, 1099.

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33

“Drama was understood to play itself out in two arenas – on the stage and on the page.”¹⁸

One way to perpetuate the belief in Shakespeare’s indifference to the publication and afterlife of his playbooks is to argue that, while the influence of the printing press had spread by the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, modern notions of individuality, authorship, and copyright had not. It is true that a copyright law in the modern sense did not exist before the eighteenth century. Copyright in Shakespeare’s time, Lyman Ray Patterson rightly points out,

was a private affair of the company. The common-law courts had no part in its development, for it was strictly regulated by company ordinances. The Stationers’ company granted the copyright, and since it was developed by and limited to company members, it functioned in accordance with their self-interest . . . Authors, not being members of the company, were not eligible to hold copyright, so that the monopoly of the stationers meant that their copyright was, in practice and in theory, a right of the publisher only. Not until after the Statute of Anne [of 1709] did the modern idea of copyright as a right of the author develop.¹⁹

In so far as the legal aspect of copyright is concerned, this is an excellent summary upon which I cannot hope to improve. The argument that “the modern idea of copyright as a right of the author” did not develop until the eighteenth century is problematic, however. It fosters precisely the impression of the Renaissance writer who has no sense of having any moral rights to his works. In fact, the *idea* of copyright as the right of the author was very much present in Shakespeare’s time, though it was not anchored in the law until the eighteenth century.²⁰

In the early seventeenth century, several writers show keen awareness of what they perceived as the stationers’ usurpation of their rights. In his petition for a patent for his *Paraphrase upon the Psalmes*, George Sandys wrote that, “whereas the Company of Stationers have an order, that no Printer shall print any booke but for one of their own Societie, thereby to ingrosse to themselves the whole profit of other mens Labours; He humbly

¹⁸ Julie Stone Peters, *Theatre of the Book, 1480–1880: Print, Text, and Performance in Europe* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1, 4–5, 8.

¹⁹ Lyman Ray Patterson, *Copyright in Historical Perspective* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968), 5. On the subject of copyright, see also chapter 5 of Marjorie Plant, *The English Book Trade: An Economic History of the Making and Sale of Books* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1939), 98–121; Mark Rose, *Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993); and Joseph Loewenstein, *Ben Jonson and Possessive Authorship* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

²⁰ This point has recently been well made by Brian Vickers (*English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. Vickers (Oxford University Press, 1999), 29).

desireth, that your Majestie wilbe pleased to grant him a Patent of Priviledge for these his Paraphrases.”²¹ When George Wither was involved in a dispute with the Stationers’ Company over a patent for his *Hymns and Songs of the Church* in the 1620s, he tells us that he “humbly petitioned the Kings most excellent Maiestie” so that “according to the lawes of nature, I might enioy the benefit of some part of myne owne labours.” Authorial copyright is here not a modern notion that is anachronistically imposed upon a time and a society in which it did not yet apply, but one which, as Wither tells us, should always apply “according to the lawes of nature.” Wither explains that “by an vniust custome . . . the Stationers haue so vsurped vpon the labours of all writers, that when they [the writers] haue consumed their youth and fortunes in perfiting some laborious worke, those cruell Bee-masters burne the poore Athenian bees for their hony, or else driue them from the best part thereof.”²² Like others before and after him (including Heminge and Condell in the prefatory material to Shakespeare’s First Folio), Wither is scandalized by the interference of stationers who “take vppon them to publish bookes contriued, altered, and mangled at their owne pleasurs, without consent of the writers: nay and to change the name sometymys, both of booke and Author (after they haue been ymprinted).”²³ He concludes that “it is high tyme to seeke a remedie, and a remedy (I hope) wil shortly be prouided in due place.”²⁴ A copyright that protected stationers but not authors seems to have been thought of by many writers as a historically contingent “vniust custome” that was defying “the lawes of nature.”

Nor did the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century practice of protecting stationers but not authors apply to all books. King James and his successor granted a series of patents to authors who were thereby allowed to derive a profit from the sale of their books. Samuel Daniel was granted a patent for his *History of England*, Fynes Moryson for his *Itinerary*, Caleb Morley for “a book invented by him for the helpe of memory and grounding of Schollars

²¹ Bodleian MS Bankes 11/62, dated 1635, printed in W. W. Greg, *Companion to Arber* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 321.

²² George Wither, *The Schollers Purgatory* (London, 1624), A3^r. A facsimile edition is available in “The English Experience” series (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1977). For the original text of the royal “privilege” and for some of the other surviving legal documents, see Greg, *Companion to Arber*, 212–18. On Wither’s dispute with the Stationers’ Company, see Norman E. Carlson, “Wither and the Stationers,” *Studies in Bibliography*, 19 (1966), 210–15; Jocelyn C. Creigh, “George Wither and the Stationers: Facts and Fiction,” *Publications of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 74 (1980), 49–57; and James Doelman, “George Wither, the Stationers’ Company and the English Psalter,” *Studies in Philology*, 90 (1993), 74–82. For a previously unknown reply to Wither that presents the stationers’ point of view, see Allan Pritchard, “George Wither’s Quarrel with the Stationers: An Anonymous Reply to *The Schollers Purgatory*,” *Studies in Bibliography*, 16 (1963), 27–42.

²³ Wither, *Schollers Purgatory*, A5^r–A6^r. ²⁴ *Ibid.*, A6^r.

in severall languages,” Joseph Webb “for the teaching the languages after a newe sorte by him devised, and alsoe the printing of the bookes and selling them.” Many more could be added.²⁵ The growing number of patents that allowed authors to reap the benefits of their inventions testifies to the fact that the *idea* of copyright as the right of the author was not absent from Renaissance England.

Unlike many poets of his own time, however, Shakespeare was first and foremost a playwright. Providing the company in which he was also an actor and shareholder with scripts, Shakespeare was a participant in an entertainment industry that needed plays to make money. As in today’s movie industry, novelty was often the key to commercial success. While poets may well have hoped to create an “immortall moniment,” many playwrights knew they were producing little more than theatrical fast food. Yet, to understand the Elizabethan and Jacobean plays that have come down to us as mere products and unlikely survivors of an entertainment industry that only produced to the moment does less than full justice to the status these plays had. For their very existence bears witness to the fact that, during Shakespeare’s time, many plays started having more than one kind of public existence: on stage *and* on the page; at the Globe, the Rose, or the Fortune *and* in St. Paul’s Churchyard; produced by players *and* by printers. During Shakespeare’s lifetime, *The First Part of Henry IV* would not only have been watched by a great number of spectators, but also read by all those who bought the printed playbooks that appeared in no fewer than six editions. Shakespeare’s attitude toward the emergent printed drama, the place his plays occupy within it, and the way in which it may have affected the composition of his plays are at the center of this book.

Before introducing the nine chapters in which I propose to develop these issues, it is necessary to deal with the broader question of the status of printed playbooks in Renaissance England. Today, Elizabethan and

²⁵ I quote from the list of “Printing Patents Granted by James the First and His Successor,” in Edward Arber, ed., *A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London, 1554–1640*, 5 vols. (London: Privately Printed, 1875–94), 5.lvii–lviii. The fullest treatment this topic has received is Arnold Hunt’s “Book Trade Patents, 1603–1640,” in *The Book Trade and Its Customers: Historical Essays for Robin Myers*, eds. Arnold Hunt, Giles Mandelbrote, and Alison Shell (Winchester, Hampshire: St. Paul’s Bibliographies, 1997), 27–54. Hunt shows that James and his son granted more than seventy patents, more than half of which did not go to members of the Stationers’ Register (27–28). Hunt presents convincing evidence that suggests that the increase of the number of patents to authors in the early seventeenth century was due to “authorial dissatisfaction with the restrictions imposed by the system of publisher’s copyright” (31). See also Phoebe Sheavyn, *The Literary Profession in the Elizabethan Age*, 2nd edn, rev. by J. W. Saunders (Manchester University Press, 1967), 76–77.