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

Lukas Erne

Frontmatter

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LITERARY DRAMATIST

Now in a new edition, Lukas Erne's groundbreaking study argues that Shakespeare, apart from being a playwright who wrote theatrical texts for the stage, was also a literary dramatist who produced reading texts for the page. Examining the evidence from early published playbooks, Erne argues that Shakespeare wrote many of his plays with a readership in mind and that these "literary" texts would have been abridged for the stage because they were too long for performance. The variant early texts of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Henry V*, and *Hamlet* are shown to reveal important insights into the different media for which Shakespeare designed his plays. This revised and updated edition includes a new and substantial preface that reviews and intervenes in the controversy the study has triggered, and lists reviews, articles, and books which respond to or build on the first edition.

LUKAS ERNE is Professor of English at the University of Geneva. He has been the Fowler Hamilton Research Fellow at Christ Church, University of Oxford, and the recipient of research fellowships at the Folger Shakespeare Library and the Huntington Library. Lukas Erne's other publications include this book's sequel *Shakespeare and the Book Trade* (2013), *Shakespeare's Modern Collaborators* (2008), and *Beyond "The Spanish Tragedy": A Study of the Works of Thomas Kyd* (2001). He is also the editor, with Guillemette Bolens, of *Medieval and Early Modern Authorship* (2011), of *The First Quarto of Romeo and Juliet* (2007), and, with M. J. Kidnie, of *Textual Performances: The Modern Reproduction of Shakespeare's Drama* (2004). The first edition of *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* was published in 2003 and was named a "book of the year" in the *Times Literary Supplement*.

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

Lukas Erne

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

For Katrin

Cambridge University Press

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

Lukas Erne

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	x
Preface to the second edition	I
Introduction	26
PART I PUBLICATION	53
1 The legitimization of printed playbooks in Shakespeare's time	55
2 The making of "Shakespeare"	80
3 Shakespeare and the publication of his plays (I): the late sixteenth century	102
4 Shakespeare and the publication of his plays (II): the early seventeenth century	125
5 The players' alleged opposition to print	139
PART II TEXTS	153
6 Why size matters: "the two hours' traffic of our stage" and the length of Shakespeare's plays	155
7 Editorial policy and the length of Shakespeare's plays	198
8 "Bad" quartos and their origins: <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> , <i>Henry V</i> , and <i>Hamlet</i>	216
9 Theatricality, literariness, and the texts of <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> , <i>Henry V</i> , and <i>Hamlet</i>	244

Cambridge University Press

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

Lukas Erne

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii

Contents

Appendix A: The plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries in print, 1584–1623	269
Appendix B: Heminge and Condell’s “Stolne, and surreptitious copies” and the Pavier quartos	280
Appendix C: Shakespeare and the circulation of dramatic manuscripts	284
<i>Select bibliography</i>	287
<i>Index</i>	303

Illustrations

- | | | |
|----|--|---------|
| 1 | Title page: <i>The Passionate Pilgrim</i> , 1612, STC 22343.
Reproduced by permission of the Bodleian Library, Oxford. | page 28 |
| 2 | Cancel title page: <i>The Passionate Pilgrim</i> , 1612, STC 22343.
Reproduced by permission of the Folger Shakespeare
Library, Washington, D.C. | 29 |
| 3 | Title page: <i>Tamburlaine</i> , 1590, STC 17425. Reproduced by
permission of the Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif. | 62 |
| 4 | Title page: <i>Volpone</i> , 1607, STC 14783. Reproduced by
permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library,
Washington, D.C. | 63 |
| 5 | Title page: <i>Richard II</i> , 1597, STC 22307. Reproduced by
permission of the Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif. | 83 |
| 6 | Title page: <i>Richard II</i> , 1598, STC 22308. Reproduced by
permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library,
Washington, D.C. | 84 |
| 7 | Title page: <i>Richard III</i> , 1597, STC 22314. Reproduced by
permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library,
Washington, D.C. | 85 |
| 8 | Title page: <i>Richard III</i> , 1598, STC 22315. Reproduced by
permission of the Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif. | 86 |
| 9 | <i>The Second Maiden's Tragedy</i> , MS Lansdowne 807, fol. 37b.
By permission of the British Library, London. | 185 |
| 10 | <i>The Lady Mother</i> , MS Egerton 1994, fol. 192b. By permission
of the British Library, London. | 186 |
| 11 | Page of text: <i>Hamlet</i> , 1676, page 57. Reproduced by permission
of the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C. | 192 |
| 12 | Page of text: <i>The Duchess of Malfi</i> , 1708, page 18. Reproduced by
permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C. | 195 |

Cambridge University Press

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

Lukas Erne

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgments

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Acknowledgments

xi

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Cambridge University Press

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

Lukas Erne

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xii

Acknowledgments

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Finally, I wish to thank Katrin for unfailing support and encouragement. To her this book is affectionately dedicated.

Preface to the second edition

Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist, first published by Cambridge University Press in 2003, argues that Shakespeare wrote his plays not only with performance but also with a readerly reception in mind.¹ It contends that Shakespeare and his company, around the turn of the seventeenth century, had a policy of having his plays published, that Shakespeare wrote long play texts of which he knew considerable portions would not be performed but would be available to his readers, and that those plays of which short and long versions are extant – notably *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Henry V* – reflect (in admittedly opaque ways) the two media for which Shakespeare conceived his plays, the stage and the page.

Appearing at a time when performance criticism had acquired importance in Shakespeare studies and when the view of Shakespeare as a “man of the theater” was prominent, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* offered a reconsideration of Shakespeare’s authorial status. The monograph attracted attention, some of it positive and some of it skeptical or even hostile. Reviewers wrote that it “sets out probably the most exhilarating change in our image of Shakespeare as a writer for decades” (Peter Holland), “achieves nothing less than the complete undoing of our understanding of Shakespeare as author” (Dympna Callaghan), will “certainly change our future discourse about dramatic texts and about Shakespeare” (Richard Knowles), and is perhaps “one of those rare books that changes how Shakespeare is perceived and edited” (Colin Burrow).² No less significantly, others have passionately

¹ I am grateful to Patrick Cheney and Richard Waswo for their feedback to earlier versions of this Preface and to Leigh Mueller and Christina Sarigiannidou at Cambridge University Press for their help in preparing this second edition for publication.

² Holland, “Review,” 5 (this review appeared in a Norwegian translation, and I am grateful to Peter Holland for sharing with me the English original, from which I quote); Callaghan, “Review,” 406; Knowles, “Review,” 551; Burrow, “Review,” 324. Reviews of *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* are identified in this Preface by name of author and the short title “Review,” the full reference being available in the Further reading list on pp. 22–25. Articles and books listed in Further reading are similarly identified by name and short title only.

Cambridge University Press

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

Lukas Erne

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

disagreed with the book, claiming that its author and all those who agree with him suffer from a post-9/11 trauma or, as happened at the Blackfriars conference in Staunton, Virginia, in 2011, holding up a copy of the book and pantomiming machine-gunning it.³ The *World Shakespeare Bibliography* records thirty-six reviews.⁴ In 2004, a conference was organized by Richard Wilson at the University of Lancaster whose aim was to discuss the argument of *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*, which led to a collection of essays, *Shakespeare's Book*, edited by Richard Meek, Jane Rickard, and Wilson. Partly prompted by *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*, *Shakespeare Studies*, in 2008, featured a forum, edited by Patrick Cheney, devoted to "The Return of the Author." Other books and articles have similarly addressed or built on *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*. The chief aim of the Preface to this second edition is to contribute to the debate the book has stimulated in the decade since its original publication. The Further reading list at the end of the Preface gives publications that respond or add to *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* in significant ways. The aim of this second edition is not to rewrite the text of the first: no attempt has been made to revise throughout, although obvious errors have been corrected. Other than that, this second edition reprints the text of the first with whatever shortcomings or merits it may have.

Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist has been criticized for what I believe is a misreading of the title. The book, one reviewer writes, proposes the "refiguration of Shakespeare as a purely literary dramatist."⁵ It "sets out to prove," another reviewer holds, "that Shakespeare wrote [his plays] primarily with readers – not theater audiences – in mind."⁶ A third reviewer has even argued that "At the root of Erne's agenda is a deep vein of 'anti-theatrical prejudice.'"⁷ Yet, while I argue that "some of the more dogmatic claims that have been made about the importance of performance for our understanding of Shakespeare's plays" need to be questioned, I recognize that "The greatest part of performance-oriented Shakespeare criticism has been salutary and beneficial" (p. 47).⁸ As Hugh Grady has written, "Erne

³ See Brooks, "Review," 235–36.

⁴ Among those who sent me incisive feedback by private correspondence following the book's publication in 2003 and are thus not mentioned in the Acknowledgments to the first edition are Catherine Belsey, Keith Brown, Alan Dessen, Katherine Duncan-Jones, Richard Dutton, Philip Edwards, Ernst Honigmann, Jeffrey Knapp, Roslyn Knutson, Edward Pechter, Duncan Salkeld, Evert Sprinchorn, and Michael Steppat. I am grateful to them for their insights.

⁵ Edmondson, "Review," 419. ⁶ Brooks, "Review," 222. ⁷ Rowland, "Review," 82.

⁸ Unless otherwise indicated, parenthetical references are to the text of *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* below. I am sympathetic to William Worthen's argument for a performance criticism that does not treat performance as derivative of and secondary to the text (see "Intoxicating Rhythms"). As Worthen

Preface to the second edition

3

has no quarrel with the view that Shakespeare was a man of the theatre who wrote to supply matter for a theatrical company from which he drew his livelihood.”⁹ I argue, however, that performance is not all Shakespeare had in mind. Rather, as another reviewer has written, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* “invite[s] us to think of a Shakespeare who wrote both to be read *and* to be performed. [Erne’s] work suggests we should think of Shakespeare variously, concurrently, and perhaps confusedly, writing works that were too long for performance, revising them, sometimes alone and sometimes with others, sometimes for print, sometimes for performance, and amphibiously occupying the worlds of printed books and of the theater.”¹⁰

The strong reactions the idea of Shakespeare as a literary dramatist have provoked in some quarters may be indicative of territorial anxieties in Shakespeare studies more generally. Whose Shakespeare? Does he belong to the theater or to the academy, is he of the stage or of the page, should we watch him or read him? These are false dichotomies, but the realization that they are false does not mean we can easily escape them, and surveying responses to *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* makes me realize that some have seen these dichotomies affirmed in it. I argue that the long play texts Shakespeare wrote for many of his tragedies and histories are significantly different from and longer than the play texts spoken by the actors on stage, and that Shakespeare knew so as he was writing them. To call the shorter version “theatrical” and the longer “literary,” as I do in *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*, is right in that “theatrical” and “literary” refer to the two institutions in which Shakespeare saw his plays materialize, the public theater and the book trade. But it is true that the terms can be problematic, since they may suggest a dichotomy where none exists. For the comparatively short play texts that audiences would have heard in the theater certainly did not lack literary qualities (as the very short, intensely poetic but also startlingly stage-worthy text of *Macbeth* illustrates); nor would the passages which I argue were omitted before performance from a long play like *Hamlet* necessarily be unsuitable for the theater. Peter Holland has written that the portions I characterize as “literary” “are passages that [he has] heard work superbly on stage in a number of productions.”¹¹ I agree. They were omitted in performance not because they necessarily lacked theatricality or stage-worthiness but because the full play texts were not “short anufe [enough] with out cutting” (p. 196), as one playwright put it.

points out, his article “tak[es] issue with the rhetorical framing of ‘performance’ [in *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*], not with the revisionist account of the process and cultural impact of dramatic publishing” (320).

⁹ Grady, “Shakespeare Studies, 2005,” 108. ¹⁰ Burrow, “Review,” 325. ¹¹ Holland, “Review,” 6.

In other words, the literary and the theatrical were far more porous in Shakespeare's drama than some may have taken my study to suggest. Instead of having played out in separate spheres, the literary and the theatrical often overlapped: Shakespeare wrote long play texts with intricately poetic – or literary – material, of which he must have known that some would not reach the stage but also that some would, and would likely work very well when performed (by Richard Burbage, in particular, but also by others: think of Gaunt's "scepter'd isle" speech), material which may have been considered literary not only by readers but also by audiences. I suggest that we can occasionally observe in the gap between short and long versions of some of Shakespeare's plays the two media in which they materialized (see Chapter 9), but I do not argue that Shakespeare consistently had two separate modes of dramatic writing, the theatrical and the literary.

"Literary" is a convenient term for designating Shakespearean dramatic authorship, and one reason is the term's elasticity, its multiple resonances that contribute to my argument: Shakespeare was aware of and not indifferent to the readerly (or literary) reception of his plays (in print and, conceivably, manuscript); he and many of his contemporaries considered his printed plays as more than discardable ephemera, as literary texts of some prestige, and passages from them were included in commonplace books and anthologies, and even discussed in a scholarly treatise;¹² one of the ways in which his authorial aspirations as a dramatist manifest themselves is his over-long texts, which must have been stripped in preparation for performance of the material "*least prejudicial to the Plot or Sense*" (see p. 191), often made up of poetically intricate (or literary) language. While the elasticity of the term "literary" can be a virtue, it can also be a source of misunderstanding – all the more so as there is a sociology and politics to the term in today's academy. "Literary" does not mean "untheatrical," nor does the term save Shakespeare from the masses, "the smoky breath of the multitude," and claim him for the happy few. Nor, indeed, is "literary" synonymous with "print." The phrase "literary dramatist" encapsulates at once a style of writing, an anticipated readerly reception, a claim for generic respectability, and an authorial ambition. What it does not mean is that Shakespeare was not simultaneously a man of the theater.

¹² For the discussion of Shakespearean dramatic passages in William Scott's recently discovered treatise, *The Model of Poesy* (1601), see Stanley Wells, "A New Early Reader of Shakespeare," in *Shakespeare's Book*, eds. Meek, Rickard, and Wilson, 233–40.

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

Lukas Erne

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Preface to the second edition*

5

Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist consists of two parts, “Publication” and “Texts.” The two parts are closely connected, and the study’s overall argument depends on both, but they are also distinct enough to have received largely separate responses, and here we might examine some of them. Part I examines the publication of Shakespeare’s plays in the context of the legitimation of printed playbooks in Shakespeare’s time (chapter 1). It argues that printed playbooks were more respectable publications than has often been assumed and that “Shakespeare” became a recognized author of published drama from 1598, when his plays started appearing with his name on the title page and Francis Meres, in *Palladis Tamia*, promoted Shakespeare to a place near the top of the English canon (chapter 2).¹³ Chapter 3 is devoted to the publication of Shakespeare’s plays in the late sixteenth century and offers a revisionist account of the agency leading to the appearance of Shakespeare’s plays in print. Whereas it had often been assumed that Shakespeare was indifferent, and his company even opposed, to the publication of his plays, I argue that Shakespeare and his fellow players of the Lord Chamberlain’s Men were in favor of it. What suggests a conscious decision to have Shakespeare’s plays published is not only their massed appearance in print but also the fact that the same stationers can be shown to have been repeatedly involved in the publication of plays that seem based on authorial manuscripts (see pp. 111–13).

Several scholars have singled out this part of *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* in their response. While Peter Holland finds it “thoroughly convincing” and Lawrence Manley “a considerable strength,” David Scott Kastan has disagreed.¹⁴ In particular, Kastan denies a publication pattern, but fails to describe accurately the one I propose. The publication pattern for which I argue concerns explicitly “the twelve plays that may have been the first written by Shakespeare for the Lord Chamberlain’s Men (whom Shakespeare joined in 1594)” (pp. 103–04), and not the plays Shakespeare wrote (or co-wrote) earlier, for other companies (see p. 117).¹⁵ Kastan

¹³ Note that MacD. P. Jackson has found suggestive connections between *Palladis Tamia* and Shakespeare’s rival poet sonnets. He argues that “Shakespeare read Meres’s ‘Comparative Discourse’ attentively” and that “The Rival Poet sonnets originated . . . in a general sense of rivalry fuelled by Francis Meres’s glib inventory of England’s top poets and playwrights” (“Francis Meres,” 236, 243.). Jackson’s article lends support to the view that Shakespeare was far from indifferent to seeing his name and works in print.

¹⁴ Holland, “Review,” 6; Manley, “Review,” 31; Kastan, “To think these trifles some-thing.”

¹⁵ More recently, James J. Marino has commented on the “impossibility of establishing Shakespeare [pre-1594] company affiliations. Nor is there any evidence to suggest,” Marino continues, “that Shakespeare kept control of any play he had written, or had collaborated in writing, before joining the Chamberlain’s Men” (*Owning William Shakespeare: The King’s Men and Their Intellectual Property* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 30).

conflates the two groups of plays: “nearly one-half of the plays of Shakespeare that appeared in print by [1603] were not printed as part of a regular publication strategy by Shakespeare or his company, rendering it, therefore, something less than ‘regular.’”¹⁶ Having modified the sample within which I argue for a pattern, Kastan argues that I find regularity where I never claimed it existed.¹⁷

Kastan also contends that certain “bad” quartos contradict my argument that the Lord Chamberlain’s Men sought publication for Shakespeare’s plays.¹⁸ This seems to assume that companies had total control over the publication of their plays, which Kastan elsewhere admits they did not.¹⁹ If a stationer secured a manuscript of and the rights to a play before the Lord Chamberlain’s Men offered a longer and better manuscript of the same play for publication, then what this means is that the publisher of the “bad” quarto got his foot in the door first, not that Shakespeare and his company were opposed to the play’s publication. In the case of *Hamlet*, it even seems clear that the manuscript which underlies the “good” second quarto was sold to James Roberts before Nicholas Ling and John Trundell published the “bad” first quarto (see p. 105). The appearance of “bad” quartos offers no evidence to contradict the Lord Chamberlain’s Men’s desire to publish Shakespeare’s plays.

Kastan’s final objection centers on the famous “staying entry” of 4 August 1600 in the Stationers’ Register according to which the printing of *As You Like It*, *2 Henry IV*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, and *Every Man in His Humour* was “to be staid.” I suggest that even though some have believed that this entry reflects the Lord Chamberlain’s Men’s alleged reluctance to have Shakespeare’s plays published (see p. 127), it does not, but may simply mean that the plays “lacked ecclesiastical authorization,” as Peter Blayney and Cyndia Susan Clegg had argued earlier.²⁰ Kastan objects to this and

¹⁶ Kastan, “To think these trifles some-thing,” 42.

¹⁷ Kastan further argues that I disregard the evidence for the players’ “opposition to unauthorized printing” (ibid., 41), even though I spend many pages investigating this evidence (see Chapter 5). In particular, Kastan claims that “Brome’s 1635 contract with the Salisbury Court theater enjoining him from publishing without the sharers’ permission is not considered” by me (41). In fact, I discuss it at some length and conclude that “what the company (like the Lord Chamberlain’s Men) seems to have wanted to have a say about is the moment when – rather than the question whether – the play would be offered for publication” (p. 146).

¹⁸ Kastan, “To think these trifles some-thing,” 41–42. ¹⁹ Ibid., 44.

²⁰ See Cyndia Susan Clegg, “Liberty, License, and Authority: Press Censorship and Shakespeare,” in *A Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. David Scott Kastan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 478–79. This interpretation is supported by similar “to be staid” entries which were demonstrably occasioned by the lack of authority; for instance: “18 May, 1603. Henry Gosson. A booke called *a warninge peece to bribers* is to be staid and not entred to any but hym when he hath authority for it” (Edward Arber, ed., *A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers 1554–1640 AD*, 5 vols. (London, 1875–94),

Preface to the second edition

7

believes that the plays mentioned in the “staying entry” “provide compelling evidence for the thesis that the company tried to prevent unauthorized printing of its plays.”²¹ Even if Kastan were right, the desire to prevent *unauthorized* publication would hardly mean that the company was opposed to publication *per se*. Independently of which position is correct, what strongly argues against the actors’ alleged opposition to play publication is that three of the four plays were entered within less than three weeks and published the same or the next year in texts which appear to have been set up from authorial manuscripts. This does not suggest that the “staying entry” reflects a failed attempt by the Lord Chamberlain’s Men to prevent publication (see p. 127). Contrary to Kastan, Richard Knowles writes: “I welcome Erne’s demolition of the old argument that the company did not see publication as in their best interest.”²²

Based on the dates of composition and publication (or Stationers’ Register entrance), I argue that, unless legal constraints or prior publication prevented them, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men usually sold Shakespeare’s manuscripts to stationers approximately two years after the plays first reached the stage (see pp. 110–11). Kastan claims that this part of the argument “depends on a highly conjectural dating of the plays.”²³ My book acknowledges that the traditional dating of Shakespeare’s plays is “necessarily conjectural” (p. 109) and that the two-year rule is no more than an approximation (see p. 111). All that is needed to understand the consistency – if not absolute regularity – with which Shakespeare’s Lord Chamberlain’s plays reached print is an approximate sense of chronology, and that is conveniently provided in the “Introduction” to the *Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*, by Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, and Kastan himself:

Plays written for the new company at the Theatre in the five years from 1594 until the opening of the Globe in the autumn of 1599, in possible sequence of

111. 36). For the meaning of “authority,” see Peter W. M. Blayney, “The Publication of Playbooks,” in *A New History of Early English Drama*, eds. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 396–98.

²¹ See Kastan, “To think these trifles some-thing,” 44.

²² Knowles, “Review,” 548. In an article which aims to make a contribution to the question of “How willing . . . the Lord Chamberlain’s Company [were] to see their plays published,” it has been argued that the “staying entry” was designed to prevent James Roberts, the playbill printer, from publishing the plays of Shakespeare’s company (see Hirrel, “The Roberts Memoranda,” 711). The argument that “Roberts regularly acquired and sought to publish the [Lord Chamberlain’s Men’s] play manuscripts without the company’s own permission” (728) is unconvincing given that Roberts never published a single play (see Erne, *Shakespeare and the Book Trade*, 159–61). Nor is there any convincing evidence which relates the entry of 4 August 1600 to Roberts.

²³ Kastan, “To think these trifles some-thing,” 40.

Cambridge University Press

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

Lukas Erne

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

compositions, are *Romeo and Juliet*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *King Richard II*, *King John*, *The Merchant of Venice*, the two parts of *King Henry IV*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and (at some date before summer 1598) the lost *Love's Labour's Won*. *As You Like It* and *King Henry V* may belong in this group, though both show signs of having been written with the Globe in mind.²⁴

Of the twelve or thirteen plays here mentioned – depending on whether “Love’s Labour’s Won” really is a lost play or the alternative title of an extant one (see p. 106) – all but two appeared in print from 1597 to 1602. Of the remaining two, it appears that the company tried to have one published in 1600 but failed (*As You Like It*) and that the other one could not be published for legal reasons (*King John*), given that the similar *Troublesome Raigne of Iohn King of England* was already in print (see pp. 106–7). Kastan believes there is no evidence that the Lord Chamberlain’s Men pursued a policy of publication and would like us to return to what Paul Menzer calls “the canard that Shakespeare took no interest in the publication of his plays,”²⁵ but a look at the publication pattern shows that Shakespeare and his fellows published as many of his first dozen Lord Chamberlain’s Men’s plays as they could.

Print publication some time after a play first reached the stage may have provided free publicity when it was revived (see pp. 114–15). There may be an additional reason for the time gap between first performance and publication which I did not investigate: publishers may have been reluctant to invest in a play until it had proven its popularity in the theater. Continued performance or occasional revivals of a play would likely help sales of the published playbook, just as print publication of a play would recommend it to theater-goers.²⁶ Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser have shown that playbooks had an unusually high reprint rate, considerably higher than sermon-books and speculative books more generally, even though market shares of playbooks were modest compared to those of sermon-books.²⁷ The explanation may be that in the case of playbooks, publishers had unusually reliable indications of whether a play would sell

²⁴ Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, and David Scott Kastan, gen. eds., *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*, rev. edn (London: Methuen, 2011), 6.

²⁵ Menzer, *The Hamlets*, 37.

²⁶ See Tiffany Stern’s insistence on “the extent to which [playhouse and printing house] shared interests” (“‘On each Wall and Corner Poast’: Playbills, Title-pages, and Advertising in Early Modern London,” *English Literary Renaissance*, 36 (2006), 64).

²⁷ See Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser, “The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited,” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 56 (2005), 1–32.

Preface to the second edition

9

well because of its popularity in the theater.²⁸ Once a play had had success in the theater, publishers had good reasons to invest in it, just as Shakespeare and his fellows must have encouraged publication because availability in another medium provided welcome publicity. A question that has repeatedly arisen is who exactly wanted Shakespeare's plays to be published: the stationers, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, or Shakespeare? At the turn of the seventeenth century, the answer, I suggest, is all three, though for different reasons: the stationers because Shakespeare's successful plays promised good sales in the book trade; the Lord Chamberlain's Men because print publication provided free publicity for the play in the playhouse; and Shakespeare because he was pleased to see his plays in print.²⁹

After 1603, only three of Shakespeare's plays were newly published before the end of his lifetime, *King Lear* in 1608 and *Pericles* and *Troilus and Cressida* in 1609, although *Troilus and Cressida* had been entered in the Stationers' Register six years earlier. The evidence suggests that, while manuscripts of Shakespeare's plays were sold to stationers with some regularity up to 1603, this was no longer the case after that year. Chapter 4 attempts to outline the possible reasons for this breakdown: a temporary glut in the market for playbooks, the revival of children's companies, the change of patron (and reign), the frequent closure of the theaters due to plague, the publication of "bad" editions, the idea of a collected edition of Shakespeare's plays, and a change in publication strategy from print to manuscript presentation copies. I conclude that, after 1603, "print publication seems to have been postponed, possibly in lieu of manuscript presentation copies for influential patrons. Whatever other reasons there may have been for this postponement . . . the time may well have come when Shakespeare and his fellows projected a collected edition and therefore refrained from publishing in cheap quartos" (p. 138). One reviewer attributes to me the idea "that Shakespeare or his company may, as early as 1602–3, have been contemplating a complete Folio edition,"³⁰ but I consciously wrote no such thing and find the idea of a folio edition in 1602–3 implausible. The only collection consisting exclusively of plays that was published in the first years of the seventeenth century is William Alexander's *Monarchick Tragedies* (1604, with a "Newly enlarged"

²⁸ Tamsin Badcoe and I develop this idea in "Shakespeare and the Popularity of Poetry Books in Print, 1583–1622," *The Review of English Studies* (forthcoming).

²⁹ It is noteworthy that Shakespeare, after joining the Lord Chamberlain's Men, wrote plays with strong lyrical elements (what earlier critics called his "lyric phase"): in 1594, pondering whether to continue writing poetry or to return to writing plays, Shakespeare may well have consciously chosen to do both at once, writing plays with much poetry which, like his narrative poems, sold well in the book trade. I develop this idea in "Print and Manuscript," 64–69.

³⁰ Manley, "Review," 31.

Cambridge University Press

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

Lukas Erne

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

edition in 1607), but that collection appeared in quarto. A folio collection may have become thinkable for Shakespeare once Jonson had started preparing his, late in Shakespeare's career. I agree with W. W. Greg, Stanley Wells, Katherine Duncan-Jones, and Ernst Honigmann that Shakespeare may have envisaged a folio collection of his plays (and even his works) before the end of his life, and, given that he is usually considered to have written plays until about 1613, it is possible that he started doing so before he ceased writing for the stage.³¹ But I do not suggest that the publication pattern breaks down in 1603 because of plans for the First Folio.

Alan Dessen has written that he has “no better explanation than [Erne's] (a move to presentation copies) for Shakespeare and his colleagues' apparent indifference to publication” after *c.* 1603.³² Richard Knowles has explored a different avenue:

[Erne] dismisses the notion that the plague suddenly made publication unprofitable, arguing that plays from other companies continued to appear during this period. Still, other companies may have felt more need for publicity than did Shakespeare's men, who had reached the apex of success when chosen in 1603 to be the King's own players; and if Leeds Barroll is right that in the years 1603–8 the theaters were closed during 54 of 72 months, at a time when REED records show the company often on tour, advance publicity for uncertain London revivals might have seemed a poor investment of time and effort.³³

Knowles may be right that, at a time when the company's new name lent it cachet and the plague made London revivals uncertain, the company decided that the publication of playbooks should wait until more propitious times. What Shakespeare made of the interruption of play publication after 1603 seems impossible to recover, but it is suggestive that he may have seriously reduced his presence amidst his company around this time. In his Shakespeare biography, *Soul of the Age*, Jonathan Bate has argued that Shakespeare “stopped acting around the time of the 1603–04 plague outbreak.”³⁴ Bate notes that Shakespeare “is in the cast list of Ben Jonson's plays *Every Man in his Humour* (1598) and *Sejanus* (1603), but, unlike Richard Burbage, John Hemings, Henry Condell and the rest of his fellows in the King's Men, not those of *Volpone* (1605), *The Alchemist* (1610) and *Catiline* (1611).”³⁵ Nor, he adds, does Shakespeare's name appear in “a

³¹ See below, pp. 136–37, and Honigmann, “How Happy Was Shakespeare with the Printed Versions of His Plays?”

³² Alan Dessen, private correspondence, August 22, 2004. ³³ Knowles, “Review,” 548–49.

³⁴ Jonathan Bate, *Soul of the Age: The Life, Mind and World of William Shakespeare* (New York: Viking, 2008), 355.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 355.

Preface to the second edition

II

recently discovered list of ‘Players of Interludes’ in the records of the royal household, dated 1607,” a document which “lists Burbage the lead actor, Hemings the actor and company manager, Armin the company clown and others of the King’s Men – but not Shakespeare.”³⁶ According to Bate, “remarkably, there are no firm sightings of [Shakespeare] in London between autumn 1604 . . . and May 1612.” Hence, Bate believes that Shakespeare spent most of his time in part-retirement in Stratford, where he “seems to have focused his energies on writing a few long and complex tragedies.”³⁷ If Bate is right, and if the plague made London revivals uncertain, then perhaps not much benefit could have been derived from early publication, and Shakespeare and his manuscripts may have been mostly in Stratford. Ultimately, however, the exact reasons for the marked decrease in newly published Shakespeare playbooks after 1603 must remain a matter of speculation.

Part II of *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* argues that many of Shakespeare’s plays are too long to have been performed in their entirety and that substantial abridgement would have been the usual practice when preparing them for the stage. Some reviewers have endorsed this argument. Peter Holland, for instance, finds “completely convincing” the argument that Shakespeare “wrote plays that were too long for performance and that one of the first tasks of the company when they received most of Shakespeare’s plays from him, must have been to cut them before they ever started rehearsing.”³⁸ Yet others have remained skeptical. Lawrence Manley approvingly quotes David Bradley’s view that this would imply “that Shakespeare’s originals were filled out with irrelevant . . . material which he must have composed in the sure expectation that it would be jettisoned.”³⁹ In this statement, much depends on how we understand the word “irrelevant.” Few would claim that Q2 *Hamlet* contains “irrelevant” passages, but it can hardly be denied that the play in performance easily survives abridgement, as centuries of cutting in the playhouse (precisely documented as early as the players’ quarto of 1676) show. Bradley’s statement presupposes that Shakespeare’s sole way of judging the relevance of a line or passage he wrote was its regular performance, a presupposition which I believe is incorrect. Moreover, if Shakespeare’s plays were often abridged before performance, this does not mean that the foul papers were of a length which the company considered undesirable. Rather, the length of the original play text may have allowed the company to have a say in the process

³⁶ Ibid., 356. ³⁷ Ibid., 357–58, 356. ³⁸ Holland, “Review,” 5. ³⁹ Manley, “Review,” 34.

of abridgement, thereby strengthening certain features of the original text while omitting or toning down others. When the play was revived at a later date, the company may have decided to perform the same or a different abridgement. Authorial manuscripts that are too long for performance may thus have given the company welcome flexibility when preparing the play for the stage.

Richard Rowland has offered a specific challenge to this part of the argument. He writes that “the aspect of this book which will surely create the most waves in the academic world is the claim . . . that most of the extant ‘good’ texts of Shakespeare’s plays – quarto and Folio alike – are too long to have been played in the theatres for which they were ostensibly written.”⁴⁰ He goes on to claim that “Erne’s argument, however, . . . is deeply flawed”:

[Erne] asserts (rightly) that some of the most important evidence of playhouse practice is to be found amongst extant dramatic manuscripts, and the book mentions, at least in passing, all of them. On closer inspection, though, this survey turns out to be selective rather than comprehensive. Heywood’s *The Captives*, one of the few manuscripts in which can be seen both the playwright’s hand in the process of composition and the book-keeper’s attempts to prepare the play for the stage, merits inclusion only in a footnote (unindexed), and that reference is to a modern edition in which there is no space to examine the uncertainties presented by the manuscript. Amongst those uncertainties are the extent and nature of the cuts which appear to have been made, and I suspect that the reason this play does not feature in Erne’s discussion is that its length – even after the most draconian assessment of the company’s pruning exercise – remains at around 3,000 lines, which is very much longer than the 2,200 Erne insists is the maximum workable limit for the “two hours’ traffic of our stage.”⁴¹

Not only does Rowland argue that Heywood’s abridged *Captives* is “very much longer” than the maximum 2,200-line length of performed play texts, but he even suspects that I have omitted this fact.

Yet both of Rowland’s figures are inaccurate. Concerning “the maximum workable limit,” what I write is that “all playbooks that significantly exceed an approximate length of 2,800 lines would have been abridged in performance” (p. 205). Elsewhere, the formulation is different, but the maximal figure mentioned is still the same: “[Alfred] Hart believed that plays would have a more or less uniform length of between 2,300 and 2,400 lines, but we are likely to be closer to the truth if we assume that the lengths varied from less than 2,000 to about 2,800 lines” (p. 171). The figure “2,200,” compared

⁴⁰ Rowland, “Review,” 80. ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

Preface to the second edition

13

to which the alleged 3,000 lines of *The Captives* are “very much longer,” is in fact Rowland’s, not mine.

Which leaves the length of *The Captives*. The edition to which I refer is that edited by Paul Merchant for The Revels Plays Companion Library.⁴² Despite what Rowland writes, Merchant squarely addresses the nature and extent of the cuts in the manuscript.⁴³ He excludes from the text the lines Heywood marked for omission but prints them in an appendix. He preserves the passages marked for omission by the book-keeper and records all these passages in the collation. I used Merchant’s edition because it allows for a representative line count. In the original manuscript, many of the lines are very short. A representative passage reads:

Palest	oh syr to you
	we ffly as to a ffather
Ashburne.	and I’l guard you
	as weare you myne owne children
Mildewe.	gainst there lord
	owner and mayster, ⁴⁴

Merchant relineates this and many other passages, and the resulting arrangement makes it possible to compare the play’s length to that of Shakespeare’s plays, whereas the chopped lines in the manuscript do not. Rowland may have arrived at his line number (around 3,000 lines after abridgement) by consulting the Malone Society Reprint, which respects the lineation in the manuscript. The line numbers of Malone Society Reprints include stage directions and act and scene numbers, another reason why its total line number cannot be compared to that of Shakespeare’s plays in modern editions. The total number of lines in Merchant’s edition is 2,478. If we subtract the lines marked for omission by the book-keeper, the total is 2,424 lines. Rowland claims that I argue for a maximal length for performed play texts of 2,200 lines and that Heywood’s abridged *Captives* has 3,000 lines. The truth is that I argue for a maximal length of approximately 2,800 lines and that Heywood’s abridged *Captives* has little more than 2,400 lines.

It may be worthwhile pointing out that by 2003 several scholars had already suggested that Shakespeare’s long plays must have been substantially abridged before performance. Brian Vickers, for instance, pointed out in

⁴² Paul Merchant, ed., *Thomas Heywood: Three Marriage Plays*, The Revels Plays Companion Library (Manchester University Press, 1996).

⁴³ See *ibid.*, 20, 266–75.

⁴⁴ I quote from Thomas Heywood, *The Captives*, ed. Arthur Brown, Malone Society Reprints (Oxford University Press, 1953), lines 1538–44.

1989 that Folio *Hamlet*, though 200 lines shorter than the second quarto, “is still far too long for performance, and would have had to ‘lose’ another 800 to 1,000 lines.”⁴⁵ Philip Edwards once remarked (as reported by Richard Knowles) that “if he were to meet Shakespeare, his first question would be, Why did you write so many plays that were too long to perform without cutting.”⁴⁶ Shortly after 2003, Andrew Gurr argued “that 2,500 [lines] was close to maximal for a play-script, and that plays of greater length were still routinely cut for performance.”⁴⁷ Stephen Orgel went even further: “with very few exceptions, every printed Shakespeare text is far too long for the two to two-and-one-half hours that is universally accepted as the performing time of plays in the period . . . Every play, that is, would normally have been cut for production.”⁴⁸ While sixteen of Shakespeare’s plays are unusually long (in excess of 2,800 lines), nine of them are shorter than 2,500 and conform well enough to the average length of plays by his contemporaries. Nevertheless, for Shakespeare’s long plays Orgel’s point is entirely valid.

Despite the evidence for abridgement, Michael J. Hirrel has argued that “the longer plays of Jonson and Shakespeare were performed essentially as written.”⁴⁹ Hirrel suggests that theatrical events (not only the play but also other entertainment before, during, and after the play) could last up to four hours, but his argument that Shakespeare’s (and Jonson’s) long plays were therefore performed in their entirety is unconvincing. Hirrel claims to find evidence in “the surviving print texts,” an unreliable source for what was actually performed given that the manuscripts from which the printed texts were set up were often abridged before performance.⁵⁰ Hirrel’s point that the variation in the length of printed play texts “can have occurred only if the acting companies wanted play scripts at these various lengths” is clearly wrong: there is ample evidence, as we will see in a moment, that the authorial play texts were considerably longer than what the companies needed and performed.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Brian Vickers, “Review of William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works and A Textual Companion*, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford, 1986–87),” *The Review of English Studies*, 40 (1989), 404.

⁴⁶ Knowles, “Review,” 545. See also Edwards’s *Shakespeare: A Writer’s Progress* (Oxford University Press, 1986), 20–23, and his New Cambridge Shakespeare edition of *Hamlet*, updated edition (Cambridge University Press, 2003): “A strong argument against the Folio text being based on the promptbook is its length. At 3,535 lines it is only 140 lines or so shorter than the second quarto, and as Greg said it cannot ‘suggest any serious attempt to shorten the play’ (*Shakespeare’s First Folio*, p. 317) . . . there is no chance of a play of over 3,500 lines being acted in full” (20).

⁴⁷ Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespeare Company, 1594–1642* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 123.

⁴⁸ Stephen Orgel, *The Authentic Shakespeare and Other Problems of the Early Modern Stage* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 237.

⁴⁹ Hirrel, “Duration of Performances,” 181. ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 169. ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 169–70.

Preface to the second edition

15

In his attempt to demonstrate that plays were not abridged due to excessive length, Hirrel claims that acting companies “had additions written to their plays, often without making equivalent deletions,” amounting to texts of “more than 3,000 lines.”⁵² He illustrates this statement by reference to *The Spanish Tragedy*, unaware that it has long been known that in the 1602 text of that play, “new material is inappropriately added side by side with old material which had been erased for the stage.”⁵³ He refers to an annotated quarto of the two parts of *Edward IV* whose cuts reduce the text to “approximately 3,185 lines,”⁵⁴ but does not tell us that the scholar who has studied this quarto concludes that the play “was not actually realized in performance.”⁵⁵ Discussing the evidence from extant manuscript playbooks, Hirrel argues that “shorter prompt copies were cut essentially in the same proportion as longer ones” and claims that “Erne makes no argument otherwise.”⁵⁶ But I do argue otherwise and show that there is a “pattern according to which relatively long manuscripts were cut while relatively short manuscripts often were not” (p. 187). I add that Eric Rasmussen had already established that “scripts were often deemed to be too long and were cut in order to reduce overall playing time.”⁵⁷

Hirrel concedes that most long plays of Shakespeare’s time were written by two dramatists, Jonson and Shakespeare. Peter Holland calls this “a crucial fact, long known but completely ignored.” He continues: “as Alfred Hart showed in the 1930s, of the 233 plays acted on the public stage between 1590 and 1616 that survive, only 29 are longer than three thousand lines – and of those 29, only seven were not written by Shakespeare or Jonson . . . In addition, we know that Jonson’s long plays were cut for performance.”⁵⁸ Yet Hirrel believes that Jonson “was not likely to offer scripts to acting

⁵² Ibid., 173.

⁵³ Philip Edwards, ed., *The Spanish Tragedy, The Revels Plays* (London: Methuen, 1959), lxiv. See also Arthur Freeman, *Thomas Kyd: Facts and Problems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 118, and Lukas Erne, *Beyond “The Spanish Tragedy”: A Study of the Works of Thomas Kyd* (Manchester University Press, 2001), 123–25.

⁵⁴ Hirrel, “Duration of Performances,” 173.

⁵⁵ Richard Rowland, “Two Plays in One: Annotations in the Third Quarto of *Edward IV*,” *Textual Cultures*, 1 (2006), 46–63, 59. Of course, even if the play had been performed, only the players’ parts would reflect how much of the text was actually performed, not the annotated quarto playbook. Urkowitz, “Did Shakespeare’s Company Cut Down Long Plays to Two Hours Playing Time?,” repeatedly misrepresents my views. In particular, the article attributes to me the argument that Shakespeare’s plays were consistently cut down to a two-hour playing time (248–50, 253), an opinion with which I explicitly part company (see p. 167).

⁵⁶ Hirrel, “Duration of Performances,” 172.

⁵⁷ Eric Rasmussen, “The Revision of Scripts,” in *A New History of Early English Drama*, eds. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 443.

⁵⁸ Holland, “Review,” 5.

companies that were too long for them to use,”⁵⁹ apparently unaware that it is documented that he did just that: the title page of *Every Man Out of His Humour* (1600) points out that the printed text contains “more than hath been Publickly Spoken or Acted.” In Jonson’s address “To the Readers” prefacing his *Sejanus*, he writes: “this Booke, in all numbers [i.e., lines], is not the same with that which was acted on the publike Stage” (§3a).⁶⁰ Hirrel quotes the unusually precise performance time mentioned in *Bartholomew Fair* – “two hours and an half and somewhat more”⁶¹ – but fails to mention that, according to his own estimated performance speed of “about twenty lines per minute,”⁶² which is quite a bit faster than modern practice, Jonson’s long play must have lost over a thousand lines to be performable in that amount of time. Jonson’s vexed relation to the theater and his possessive print authorship no longer need belaboring.⁶³ Yet Hirrel imagines a Jonson “diligently attentive to the needs and desires” of the acting companies, mindful of no other teleology for his plays than the stage.⁶⁴

Much of Hirrel’s evidence is jeopardized because he *assumes* at the same time as he seeks to *prove* that the printed text gives us access to the play as it was acted. Unless we discover – as seems highly unlikely – a set of actors’ parts of a professional play, no play text gives us direct access to the length of the text spoken on stage. What we need to rely on, in other words, is circumstantial evidence, and such evidence strongly suggests that long play texts were routinely abridged before performance. As Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern put it in *Shakespeare in Parts*, “Throughout the period there is confusion as to whether to offer for publication the play that was acted on the stage or the play in a longer, more ‘ideal’ form: playwrights often opted for the latter.”⁶⁵ Hirrel omits to mention the considerable evidence I adduce for the practice of stage abridgement (pp. 162–97). No reference is made to title pages such as that of Webster’s *Duchess of Malfi*, a long play at ca. 3,000 lines, which, according to its title page, was “with diuerse things Printed, that the length of the Play would not beare in the Presentment” (pp. 168–69). Hirrel shows no awareness of the King’s Men’s practice, as reported by the stationer Humphrey Moseley, of abridging Beaumont and Fletcher’s plays, omitting entire “*Scenes and Passages*,” a suggestive fact

⁵⁹ Hirrel, “Duration of Performances,” 170.

⁶⁰ *Sejanus* was published by Jonson with a commendatory poem by “EV.B.,” which characterizes the Globe as “that doubtfull Hell / From whence, this Publication settts thee free” (A3v).

⁶¹ Hirrel, “Duration of Performances,” 174. ⁶² *Ibid.*, 161.

⁶³ See Joseph Loewenstein, *Ben Jonson and Possessive Authorship* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁶⁴ Hirrel, “Duration of Performances,” 170.

⁶⁵ Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 49.

Preface to the second edition

17

given that the “Beaumont and Fletcher” plays are shorter than Shakespeare’s and were written for the same company not long after them (see 173–79). The striking evidence that the manuscript from which Q₂ *Hamlet* was set up already contained theatrical cuts which the compositors ignored is similarly passed over in silence (201–5).⁶⁶ Nor does Hirrel consider the evidence for abridgement in what used to be called “the bad quartos,” although research by Stephen Orgel, Peter Blayney, Scott McMillin, and Andrew Gurr strongly suggests that the bad quartos are key witnesses to how Shakespeare’s plays were performed (pp. 216–43).

The chief reasons why Shakespeare wrote excessively long plays from the point of view of the public stage is that his economically secure position as shareholder in his company allowed him to do so and that he cared for a readership for his playbooks and – given his success as print author – knew there would be one.⁶⁷ If the long versions of Shakespeare’s plays were written for reading rather than performance, this has consequences for the editing of Shakespeare’s plays (chapter 7). The editors of the Oxford Shakespeare *Complete Works* “devoted [their] efforts to recovering and presenting texts of Shakespeare’s plays as they were acted in the London playhouses,” writing that they had “therefore chosen . . . to prefer – where there is a choice – the text closer to the prompt-book of Shakespeare’s company.”⁶⁸ Yet, as many scholars now argue, to recover Shakespeare’s plays “as they were acted” is fraught with problems, and to do so by editing Shakespeare’s long play texts is doubly so. As Andrew Murphy has commented,

⁶⁶ For an exploration of how one of these deletion marks, in the “Pyrrhus” speech, relates to the fiction of the play, see Gleckman, “Shakespeare as Poet or Playwright?”

⁶⁷ Henry Woudhuysen is among those who have agreed that “It is possible to argue, on textual as well as aesthetic or historical grounds, that distinct authorial versions of [Shakespeare’s] plays were produced for reading rather than performance” (“The Foundations of Shakespeare’s Text,” 99). Richard Dutton, whose first contribution to the debate over the teleology of Shakespeare’s dramatic writings was an essay arguing that he wrote for readers (see “The Birth of the Author,” in *Elizabethan Theater: Essays in Honor of S. Schoenbaum*, eds. R. B. Parker and S. P. Zitner (Newark: University of Delaware Press), 71–92), has more recently announced an investigation of the theory that Shakespeare revised his plays with a view to performance at court. In particular, Dutton departs from received wisdom to argue that the short Q₁ *Henry V* is not an abridgement of the Folio text but a first version of the play which Shakespeare later expanded into the longer version (“Not one clear item”). Duncan Salkeld has engaged with my treatment of the texts of *Henry V* with a different, indeed opposed, theory in mind: “All the evidence suggests that Q is an abridgement of the earlier F (or similar version)” and “Q shows clear signs of having been constructed either in part or in whole from memory” (“As sharp as a pen,” 145, 158).

⁶⁸ Stanley Wells, “General Introduction,” in *Shakespeare, Complete Works*, gen. eds. Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), xxxvii, and Wells, Taylor, et al., *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 15.

Cambridge University Press

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

Lukas Erne

Frontmatter

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at least some of the longer F1 texts which the Oxford editors repeatedly tend to privilege (on the grounds that they are derived from prompt-books) may not be theatrical texts at all, but may instead be extended literary texts which Shakespeare envisaged would be cut down for the stage. Far from providing their readers with a “social text,” the Oxford editors may thus unwittingly have been promoting what we might call the “antisocial text” – the text intended for private readerly perusal, a text for the study rather than the stage.⁶⁹

While Shakespeare editing in the late twentieth century was strongly shaped by the Oxford editors’ theatrical paradigm, recent years have seen a move away from it. John Jowett has written that “for editorial theory Erne’s title *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* is indicative of a new emphasis at the beginning of the twenty-first century, one that pares back the theatrical dimension and asserts on new grounds the presence of Shakespeare the author in the field of textual studies.”⁷⁰ Michael Neill’s edition of *Othello* “assumes . . . that because any playhouse version, by its very nature, represents a series of choices that foreclose on other possibilities latent in the dramatist’s ‘maximal’ script, there are sound practical reasons for producing a text as close as we can make it to that more expansive version.”⁷¹ Contrary to the Oxford Shakespeare *Complete Works*, the RSC Shakespeare *Complete Works* seeks to recover the plays not as they were performed but as they were published, in the First Folio; and general editor Jonathan Bate acknowledges that “some of [the quartos], such as the long Second Quarto (Q2) of *Hamlet* and *Romeo*, are perhaps best seen as ‘literary’ or ‘reading’ texts, while others, such as the short First Quarto (Q1) *Hamlet* and *Romeo*, offer fascinating approximations to the possible structure and extensive cutting of early performance.”⁷² Claire McEachern, the Arden editor of *Much Ado about Nothing*, comments that her “edition treats the play as a literary text, not a script.”⁷³ And Juliet Dusinberre, in her Arden edition of *As You Like It*, finds that “Aspects of the First Folio text suggest a wooing of the

⁶⁹ Andrew Murphy, “The Oxford Shakespeare Re-viewed (Again),” *Text*, 16 (2006), 157–71, 169.

⁷⁰ John Jowett, *Shakespeare and Text* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 114. For Gabriel Egan’s assessment of the possible repercussions of *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* on editing, see the sections on “Shakespeare as Literature” (215–22) and “The Future: Collaboration, Literary Authorship and the Legacy of the New Bibliography” (222–30) in *The Struggle for Shakespeare’s Text*.

⁷¹ Michael Neill, ed., *Othello*, *The Oxford Shakespeare* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 408–9.

⁷² Jonathan Bate, “The Case for the Folio,” an on-line essay which complements the “account of the editorial problem in Shakespeare . . . in the general introduction to the RSC *Shakespeare: Complete Works*” (www.modernlibrary.com/files/2010/09/TheCaseForTheFolio.pdf, accessed November 21, 2012).

⁷³ Claire McEachern, ed., *Much Ado about Nothing*, *The Arden Shakespeare* (London: Thomson Learning, 2006), 2.