CHAPTER 1

Shakespeare's Writing Practice: Value, Exchange, and the Work of Form

Does Shakespeare's status as a literary author reflect his desire for such a status, or did others confer that status on him? Did Shakespeare seek literary greatness, or was it thrust upon him? Did he write only for theatrical spectators, or for book readers too? These questions have energized Shakespeare scholarship for over a decade. According to scholars such as Lukas Erne, who argued in *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* that Shakespeare and his acting company actively sought to publish literary drama for the printed page, the playwright invested his plays with literary value.[1] For this group, although Shakespeare may not have envisioned the sacrosanct place he would achieve in English-speaking culture, he wanted his plays read as well as watched. Others, by contrast, maintain that whatever Shakespeare's aspirations, he remained indifferent to print and literary authorship.[2] Far more than the ambitions of the writer, "the individual and institutional investments of the early modern book trade" produced Shakespeare's literary reputation in the seventeenth century and beyond.[3]

The divisive point in this conversation concerns not so much what William Shakespeare wanted (an errant quest) as how and why his writings accrued value. For scholars addressing the question, two cultural markets remain ever in view, each with a well-developed set of evaluative mechanisms: the

[1] See, for instance, Patrick Cheney, *Shakespeare's Literary Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Jeffrey Knapp, *Shakespeare Only* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); and Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[2] See David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Sonia Massai, *Shakespeare and the Rise of the Editor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Zachary Lesser and Peter Stallybrass, "The First Literary *Hamlet* and the Commonplacing of Professional Plays," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (2008): 371–420; and Adam G. Hooks, *Selling Shakespeare: Biography, Bibliography, and the Book Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[3] Hooks, *Selling Shakespeare*, 4. A recent collection puts this particular point beyond question. See Marta Straznicky, ed., *Shakespeare's Stationers: Studies in Cultural Bibliography*, Material Texts (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

theatrical industry and the literary marketplace. Stage and page. Janet Clare has recently illuminated the "flourishing theatrical trade" of early modern London, arguing that Shakespeare's plays borrowed and reworked the theatrical practices of other playwrights in an economic exchange that Clare calls "stage traffic."[4] Meanwhile, the term "literary marketplace," roughly synonymous with "book trade" and "publishing industry," denotes the business of print publication, its material processes and products, its agents of production and consumption, and its operations as a cultural institution. In Geoffrey Turnovksy's words, the literary market "allow[ed] writers to make a transition out of the patronage system and into modernity."[5] Conceived in these ways, the literary market and theatrical industry work in apposition to one another as zones of cultural activity. Whether viewed as stage *and* page (as in Erne), stage *or* page, or even stage *versus* page, for scholars the two persistently operate as "incommensurab[le]" domains.[6]

A problem remains, however. Although much recent scholarship has attended to Shakespeare's positions in the book trade and theater industry, it has overlooked the constitutive elements of those positions: the nouns and pronouns, speeches and sentences, and verse forms and prose rhythms of his writings. Claiming either that Shakespeare wrote to secure a literary status or that he wrote solely for the theater market and that others subsequently heaved a literary reputation upon him, scholars have ironically disregarded the connection between Shakespeare's artistic inclinations and the particulars of composition that make up his plays and poems.[7]

[4] Janet Clare, *Shakespeare's Stage Traffic: Imitation, Borrowing and Competition in Renaissance Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 2.

[5] Geoffrey Turnovsky, *The Literary Market: Authorship and Modernity in the Old Regime*, Material Texts (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 6. Turnovsky complicates this epochal transition by demonstrating "the capacity of the market, as a model, to figure the constitutive ambiguity of writers' engagements with money and commerce," exactly my concern here. See also David M. Bergeron, *Textual Patronage in English Drama, 1570–1640* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2006), 12–13; and Marta Straznicky, ed., *The Book of the Play: Playwrights, Stationers, and Readers in Early Modern England*, Massachusetts Studies in Early Modern Culture (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006).

[6] Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Book*, 7. But see also Barbara Mowat's nuanced "The Theater and Literary Culture," in *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 213–30. For big-picture approaches to the question of Shakespeare and text, see Gabriel Egan, *The Struggle for Shakespeare's Text: Twentieth-Century Editorial Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); and Margaret Jane Kidnie and Sonia Massai, eds., *Shakespeare and Textual Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[7] In this group I include Patrick Cheney, whose two books on Shakespeare focus on language primarily as a register for Shakespeare's authorial ambitions. In my account, actual linguistic exchange precedes those ambitions. See Patrick Cheney, *Shakespeare, National Poet-Playwright* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and *Shakespeare's Literary Authorship*.

The point seems so obvious that it has gone unrecognized: the practice of writing underpins stage and page. Both venues fundamentally share the impulse to value and trade in words. Scholars, justified in their emphasis on the agents of cultural production (playgoers, actors, companies, censors, patrons, scribes, stationers, compositors, booksellers, book-buyers, and readers) have avoided the categories of verbal value and exchange that existed before, after, and inside the stage and page markets. To put the point more polemically, too exclusive a focus on Shakespeare's consecration as a print author has led scholars to overlook the writing practice that made his literary consecration possible.

To understand how Shakespeare's writings acquired literary or theatrical symbolic capital, we cannot look only to the bibliographical record. We must look to the linguistic and formal one. Whether desired by the playwright or ascribed by others, Shakespeare's literary reputation grew from the formal properties of language; one way or another, his writings entailed the evaluation they subsequently received. *Shakespeare in the Marketplace of Words* therefore argues that Shakespeare was a buyer and seller of words. In this book, I will explore Shakespeare's labor in a network of production, circulation, and consumption not primarily of printed texts or theatrical productions but of verbal symbolic goods – the wares of wit. Words, like other commodities, had variable exchange values in early modern England. Money and goods were exchanged with words and for words in various forms. To write in such a verbal market meant, at the very least, to anticipate the exchange value of one's words. This book shows Shakespeare working in that system of exchange. He took from other writers, texts, and discourses, transformed what he found, and retailed something potentially valuable. This exchange activity took place in the very composition of plays and poems. Close study of those interactive assemblies yields new insight into plays studied for centuries. By means of the formal features of writing, which range from single words and syntax to the use of rhetorical figures, soliloquies, and prose and verse, Shakespeare crafted meaningful works of art as he staked a position in the marketplace of words. His distinctive, formal interactions made up the defining quality of his practice as a writer.

This argument does not, to be sure, entail a return to naïve formalism. Rather, I combine a concern for language and form with the study of material surroundings. In doing so, I am responding to the prevalence of book history and textual studies in scholarship on early modern England.[8] This

[8] In a recent collection, Allison Deutermann and András Kiséry write that "book history has become something like a *koiné* of the historically oriented study of early modern literature, its core

mode of inquiry, Alexandra Gillespie writes, rests on the shared assumption that we can "produce 'a human story' from a 'tale of books.' "[9] Book history has fruitfully approached material texts as indices of culture and of human activity in it. Another central axiom of this field is that books have signifying functions. They have and produce meaning; they create effects on readers; they have a grammar (constituent parts organized in a coherent pattern) and a rhetoric (symbols that elicit some response). They also have an aesthetic: books can be decorous or plain, bombastic or timid, and high or low in style. Textual studies' approach to books resembles literary criticism's to language. Jerome McGann, in an influential account, argues for the importance not only of the "linguistic codes" of texts but their "bibliographical codes," which in some accounts pre-exist and make possible the linguistic ones.[10] McGann more or less speaks for the field when he argues for the "semiotic function of bibliographical materials."[11] Applying this framework to Shakespearean texts, David Kastan writes that the material qualities of texts are "part of the text's structures of signification."[12]

Whereas recent book history scholarship treats books like words – studying how books have a signifying function similar to that of words – I treat words like books: to study words as valuable, commodifiable, and formal entities that circulated in Shakespeare's culture. I want to reconfigure McGann's statement and argue for the *bibliographical* function of *linguistic* materials. Just as we can speak of a book trade, therefore, we can also speak of an early modern verbal marketplace, a system of exchange in which words make up the primary units. Across various venues (theater, bookstall, pulpit, and alehouse) and media (play, book, manuscript, sermon, and song), early modern cultural producers traded in words while cultural consumers purchased them. The book trade and theater participated in this larger system.[13] In both institutions, to borrow a line from Pierre Bourdieu, language functioned as "a symbolic asset which [could] receive

assumptions a mantra of much historicist scholarship." See *Formal Matters: Reading the Materials of English Renaissance Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 1. See also Alexandra Gillespie, "The History of the Book," *New Medieval Literatures* 9 (2007): 245–77.

[9] Gillespie, "History of the Book," 254.

[10] Jerome J. McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 15.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Book*, 5.

[13] Robert Watson points out that the playhouse was "an actual marketplace, trading in … the evolving common language." See "Coining Words on the Elizabethan and Jacobean Stage," *Philological Quarterly* 88 (Spring 2009): 65. See also Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 118.

different values depending on the market on which it [was] offered."[14] The value of words, like any commodity, varied with the changing conditions of the system of circulation. John Wheeler, writing about free trade in 1601, acknowledged this quality of the trade of words when he listed it alongside other "ordinarie" exchanges: "all things come into Commerce, and passe into trafficque … this man make the merchandise of the workes of his own handes, this man of another mans labour, *one selleth woords*, another maketh trafficque of the skins and blood of other men."[15] In this book, I explore the way Shakespeare assembles words, trades them, and manipulates their value on a verbal market so palpable and familiar that Wheeler could list it alongside the trade in human flesh.

If any early modern writer were conscious of the overlapping, constantly shifting relationship between symbolic markets, Shakespeare makes the ideal candidate. With two popular poetry books, *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *Lucrece* (1594), and a rapidly established place in the book trade as a writer of playbooks, Shakespeare surely enjoyed notoriety in print.[16] With a successful acting company that would eventually earn royal patronage, he cornered the show business.[17] Moreover, with an increasing number of personal financial assets, Shakespeare managed the feat of true upward mobility in the course of his lifetime.[18] Although such success may rightly lead us to conclude, as many scholars have, that Shakespeare benefitted from a combination of privilege, social relations, consumer demand, marketing, and luck for the range of his success, there remains at least some evidence of Shakespeare's active participation in his own rise as a cultural phenomenon. At the very least, this evidence has effectively (and rightly) diminished the notion of Shakespeare as a writer unconcerned with the constraints of the symbolic value of words.

[14] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Economics of Linguistic Exchanges," *Social Science Information* 16, no. 6 (1977): 651.

[15] Quoted in Agnew, *Worlds Apart*, 88–89. Emphasis mine.

[16] See Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare and the Book Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). On "bestsellers," see Zachary Lesser and Alan B. Farmer, "The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (2005): 1–32; and "Structures of Popularity in the Early Modern Book Trade," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (2005): 206–13.

[17] See Bart Van Es, *Shakespeare in Company* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Richard Dutton, *Shakespeare, Court Dramatist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[18] For the documents surrounding Shakespeare's acquisition of property, see S. Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare: A Documentary Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); and Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Ungentle Shakespeare: Scenes from His Life* (London: Arden, 2001).

Shakespeare's sonnet 76 contemplates the exchange value of words and attests to the writer's self-consciousness and savvy concerning the verbal market:

> Why is my verse so barren of new pride?
> So far from variation or quick change?
> Why with the time do I not glance aside
> To new-found methods and to compounds strange?
> Why write I still all one, ever the same,
> And keep invention in a noted weed,
> That every word doth almost tell my name,
> Showing their birth, and where they did proceed?
> O know, sweet love, I always write of you,
> And you and love are still my argument;
> So all my best is dressing old words new,
> Spending again what is already spent:
> For as the sun is daily new and old,
> So is my love still telling what is told.

Asking why "my verse [is] so barren of new pride," the poet notes with some chagrin that he does not "glance aside / To new-found methods and to compounds strange."[19] These "new-found" methods of amorous expression are at a premium; readers want new verbal wares. Unlike the poet's "barren" verse that remains "ever the same" and kept "in a noted [i.e., familiar] weed," the poems of others have a currency and novelty the poet's lines do not. The poet wonders why his verse is so old-fashioned that "every word doth almost tell my name." His words are so repetitive and familiar that they give away their authorship.[20]

The poet resolves this currency problem by making two appeals. First, conventionally enough, he protests to his beloved that his verse is "ever the same" because "you and love are still my argument," and therefore his whole poetic effort goes into "dressing old words new." Then, to support his assertion, he elaborates that he is "spending again what is already spent." This is a brilliant move. Unlike the "new-found methods and compounds strange," which like any other commodity lose their value when expended, the poet's lines continually pay out what has already been exhausted. His poems make durable, iterable commodities because, like

[19] *The Sonnets*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, The New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 70.

[20] In the first edition of the sonnets (1609), the line reads "fel my name," which nearly all editors emend to "tell my name." It is also possible to emend to "sell," in which case the poem's implicit questions of value become explicit: every word of every poem *sells* the poet's name.

the sun that is "daily new and old," they "still [tell] what is told." What he initially presents as a value problem becomes a perpetual benefit, a kind of verbal interest rate.[21] Other poems have a currency his do not, but his can be spent over and over again.

On the evidence of this poem, Shakespeare seems to have thought a great deal about how to write works of literary and dramatic art that respond to the exigencies of various markets. He perceived how the iterability of words finally allows them to escape commodification in the usual sense. It comes as little surprise that when scholars address Shakespeare's uniqueness or exceptionalism, they do so primarily by reference to the dialogic quality of his language – the way in which his language draws on extant language and interacts with other discourses.[22] Stephen Booth attributes to Shakespeare's language what he calls "eventfulness," in which text "all but bursts with activity generated by incidental relationships among its elements."[23] Patricia Parker argues that Shakespeare's wordplay "make[s] possible glimpses into the relation between the plays and their contemporary culture."[24] Mikhail Bakhtin characteristically claims that "Shakespeare, like every artist, constructed his works not out of dead elements, not out of bricks, but out of forms already heavy with meanings, filled with them."[25] Even writers of Shakespeare's time remark on this quality, as when Francis

[21] On verbal usury, see Marc Shell, "The Wether and the Ewe: Verbal Usury in *The Merchant of Venice*," *The Kenyon Review*, New Series, 1, no. 4 (October 1, 1979): 65–92.

[22] The subject of Shakespeare's language has produced a vast field of scholarship. I have found the following work valuable. Foundational works include Edwin Abbott, *A Shakespearian Grammar. An Attempt to Illustrate Some of the Differences between Elizabethan and Modern English. For the Use of Schools*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1901); Anne Barton, "Shakespeare and the Limits of Language," *Shakespeare Survey* 24 (1971): 19–30; Madeleine Doran, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Language* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976); Jane Donawerth, *Shakespeare and the Sixteenth-Century Study of Language* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984); S. S. Hussey, *The Literary Language of Shakespeare*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1992); Patricia A. Parker, *Shakespeare from the Margins: Language, Culture, Context* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Lynne Magnusson, *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue: Dramatic Language and Elizabethan Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Sylvia Adamson et al., eds., *Reading Shakespeare's Dramatic Language: A Guide*, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2001); and Catherine M. S. Alexander, ed., *Shakespeare and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). On grammar and style (Shakespearean and otherwise), see N. F. Blake, *A Grammar of Shakespeare's Language* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002); Jonathan Hope, *Shakespeare's Grammar* (London: Thomson, 2003); and Lucy Munro, *Archaic Style in English Literature, 1590–1674* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[23] Stephen Booth, "Shakespeare's Language and the Language of Shakespeare's Time," in Alexander, ed., *Shakespeare and Language*, 24.

[24] Parker, *Shakespeare from the Margins*, 1.

[25] Quoted in Michael Bristol, *Big-Time Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1996), 11–12. See also Daniel Shore, "Shakespeare's Constructicon," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (2015): 113–36.

Meres claimed that Shakespeare, along with Spenser, Sidney, and others, "gorgeouslie inuested [English] in rare ornaments and resplendent abiliments."[26]

If Shakespeare indeed bought and sold words on a verbal market, wouldn't that make him rather ordinary? When all writers worked in the system of value and exchange, Shakespeare having done so hardly makes a case for his singularity. Meres, after all, lists Shakespeare alongside other poets from the period. Why Shakespeare rather than, say, the Water Poet, John Taylor, whose writings demonstrate a worrisome concern with the exchange value of words?[27] I propose that Shakespeare was a great buyer and seller of words.[28] He certainly ended his career with demonstrably higher cultural capital than Taylor did, and his subsequent fame has widened the gap considerably. The rhetoric of Shakespearean exceptionalism notwithstanding, my argument here concerns how Shakespeare, sensitive to the dynamics of value and exchange and highly engaged with the verbal market, stands out among other writers. Shakespeare embodies the rule, but he also provides a remarkable instance of that rule.[29] I make a case for Shakespeare's outstanding use of particular forms to do cultural work. Until we study Shakespeare's positions in the verbal marketplace, our understanding of his achievements in the book trade, theater industry, and at court will remain incomplete.

Shakespeare scholars have focused on the latter half of the writer's career for evidence of his ambitions (or lack of them). Erne, to choose a notable example, has gathered evidence that Shakespeare's desire for literary authorship succeeded when he emerged, around 1600, as a book trade

[26] Francis Meres, *Palladis Tamia Wits Treasury* (London, 1598), 280.

[27] See Laurie Ellinghausen, "The Individualist Project of John Taylor 'The Water Poet,'" *Ben Jonson Journal* 9 (2002): 147–69.

[28] Janet Clare makes much the same case with respect to Shakespeare's dramaturgy. See *Shakespeare's Stage Traffic*. For recent work on Shakespeare's language generally, see Simon Palfrey, *Late Shakespeare: A New World of Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Frank Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language* (New York: Penguin, 2000); Kenneth Gross, *Shakespeare's Noise* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Russ McDonald, *Shakespeare and the Arts of Language*, Oxford Shakespeare Topics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); David Crystal, *Think on My Words: Exploring Shakespeare's Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Mireille Ravassat and Jonathan Culpeper, eds., *Stylistics and Shakespeare's Language: Transdisciplinary Approaches*, Advances in Stylistics (London: Continuum, 2011); Harry Berger, *Harrying: Skills of Offense in Shakespeare's Henriad* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015); and Paul Edward Yachnin, ed., *Shakespeare's World of Words*, Arden Shakespeare Library (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2015).

[29] Recent treatments of Shakespearean exceptionalism include Jonathan Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). See also Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Shakespeare: Upstart Crow to Sweet Swan, 1592–1623*, Arden Shakespeare Library (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2011).

phenomenon.[30] Erne assumes that books constitute the primary unit of value in the book trade. Sensible enough. But if, as I have suggested, we broaden the scope to include a greater variety of semiological artifacts, then Shakespeare's emergence on a symbolic market occurred much earlier. Shakespeare did not somehow achieve the reputation of "greatest English writer" over and against what his writing afforded, even if later editors and publishers consecrated that reputation in print.[31] Shakespeare's writing promoted the conferral of value; in exchanging with the world around him, he produced valuable verbal wares.

In this book, therefore, I make the years 1595–1602 my focus. Throughout this period, the playwright worked to increase the symbolic (and cash) value of his writings. When the playhouses reopened after the plague closure of 1592–94, Shakespeare returned to dramatic writing with a keen awareness of the exchange and value of words, having published valuable narrative poetry in the interim.[32] Starting around 1595, Shakespeare made several kinds of investments. One was his purchase of a coat of arms in 1596, granting him the title of gentleman. Another was his role as company sharer in the construction of the Globe Theatre in 1599. He also acquired property in his hometown of Stratford (1597 and 1602). Moreover, others began to interact thoughtfully with his plays and poems, and his name first appeared on the title page of a playbook (1598). These investments mark the playwright's increasing cultural capital. At the same time, Shakespeare made investments in and through the formal features of his writings. In the late 1590s, for instance, Shakespeare and his company capitalized on the popularity of Falstaff in the *Henry IV* plays by featuring him in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and making significant reference to him in *Henry V*. I will show how, between 1595 and 1602, Shakespeare's participation in the verbal market led him to cultivate an artistic agenda as he dealt with issues pertinent to the professional stage and the book trade.

[30] Erne, *Shakespeare and the Book Trade*. See also Alan B. Farmer's recent "Shakespeare as Leading Playwright in Print, 1598–1608/9," in Kidnie and Massai, eds., *Shakespeare and Textual Studies*, 87–104.

[31] See Margreta de Grazia, *Shakespeare Verbatim: The Reproduction of Authenticity and the 1790 Apparatus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Douglas A. Brooks, *From Playhouse to Printing House: Drama and Authorship in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Massai, *Shakespeare and the Rise of the Editor*; Erne, *Shakespeare and the Book Trade*; and Hooks, *Selling Shakespeare*.

[32] Leeds Barroll and others have argued that Shakespeare slowed or stopped writing plays when the theaters closed. See Barroll, *Politics, Plague, and Shakespeare's Theater: The Stuart Years* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

The rest of this chapter argues that the conceptual frame of a verbal market brings into view the dimensions of *value* and *exchange* in the practice of writing. I define the market of words in order to describe, in the subsequent chapters, Shakespeare's positions in that market. Shakespeare's rise became possible because several cultural formations, coalescing at the end of the sixteenth century, made his particular skills highly valuable. The confluence of humanist academic practices, the burgeoning field of vernacular rhetoric, the rise of a capital-based economy, the competitive conditions of the theater industry, the transformative impact of print, and an extraordinary sensitivity to the formal qualities of writing produced a system in which writing and reading implicitly involved an exchange activity. For better or worse, writers increasingly viewed their words as part of a commercialized field.

The Verbal Marketplace of Early Modern England

In his praise of Shakespeare and other writers, Meres claimed that they "mightily enriched" the English language.[33] Meres conceived of this richness as a metaphor: Shakespeare and others were providing the English language with new resources for expression. As the cash payment enriches the merchant, so English has greater riches after these writers than it did before them. But is this metaphor merely metaphorical? To what extent does Meres's economic language address the material circumstances of the writing of Shakespeare and his contemporaries? After all, writers made money (albeit not much) when they sold their words at the playhouse and to stationers. Furthermore, Meres himself understood that the cash value of words fluctuated with their currency in the theaters and bookshops of London. His book *Palladis Tamia*, with the fitting subtitle *Wits Treasury*, aimed at inflating that value for English writers. The very possibility of a *rich* language carries with it the suggestion of larger forces that determine the nature and measure of that richness. Behind Meres's analogy lurks a sense that language constitutes one component in an exchange system – an economy – in which money and material goods also change hands. Words sometimes functioned as the medium of exchange (i.e., as currency), and sometimes as the thing exchanged (i.e., as a commodity).

The work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, though limited in its applicability to early modern England, provides a framework for the verbal

[33] Meres, *Palladis Tamia*, 280r.