

From Playhouse to Printing House

*Drama and Authorship in
Early Modern England*

Douglas A. Brooks



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1 “A toy brought to the Presse”: marketing printed drama in early modern London

Some Play books since I first undertooke this subject, are growne from *Quarto* into *Folio*, which yet beare so good a price and sale, that I cannot with grieffe relate it, they are now(e) new-printed in farre better paper than most Octavo or Quarto *Bibles*, which hardly finde vent as they.
William Prynne, *Histrion-mastix*

Books are objects. On a table, on shelves, in store windows, they wait for someone to come and deliver them from their materiality, from their immobility.
Georges Poulet, *Criticism and the Experience of Interiority*

I begin at the end, or rather, as befits a study of authorship written in the post-modern era when new and often indistinguishable digital sources of authority are usurping the thrones once occupied by the book-bound, after the death of an author. Given Shakespeare's decision to leave the theatre and the world without first performing what Louis A. Montrose terms “an act of textual self-monumentalization,”¹ the 1623 Folio tells a story of its dependence on the introduction and interference of several agents and intentions. The Folio's principal publishers, Edward Blount and Isaac Jaggard, were responsible for unauthorial, but nonetheless complex, negotiations with other publishers to acquire the existing publication rights for several plays previously printed in quarto editions.² They also had the responsibility of finding and hiring a printer, though this task was simplified considerably by the fact that Isaac's father, William Jaggard, was available. Keeping the project in the family must have taken precedence over the fact that the elder Jaggard had been blind for some years by the time copy was being cast off for the First Folio in the early months of 1622. Heminge and Condell were crucial to the project because, presumably, they were the source of those unpublished and unblotted manuscripts of Shakespeare's plays that remained in the possession of the King's Men after his death. Additionally, as Blayney observes,

[Shakespeare's] surviving fellows would have welcomed the planned edition as a tribute and memorial to one of the company's most successful playwrights.

Furthermore, while relatively few of his plays may have remained in regular performance by the 1620s, the book would remind the public that many once-popular plays were still available to be revived on demand.³

In other words, not only had the First Folio made possible the typographic resurrection of Shakespeare's plays "cur'd, and perfect of their limbes; and all / the rest, absolute in their numbers," but it may have also set the stage for the resuscitation of the playwright's moribund career in the theatre as well. Although Heminge and Condell probably never set foot inside of a printing house before 1622, the publicity potential of publication was one aspect of Shakespeare's transformation into cultural merchandise, of his commodification, with which they would have had some familiarity.⁴

"We do not know," according to Blayney, "whether the idea of publishing the Folio was first conceived by the players or the publishers, but the two groups had to cooperate before the idea became a reality."⁵ We do know, however, that the generic idea of publishing a folio collection of contemporary plays had initially emerged from a period of intense collaboration between Jonson and a printer named William Stansby, though Montrose has recently argued that Edmund Spenser's "publication process, unfolded over the last two decades of the sixteenth century . . . provided Jonson's most immediate and most significant native precedent and model."⁶ In the specific case of Heminge and Condell's contribution to the First Folio, especially their use of the reader address to link the value of Shakespeare's plays as purchasable commodities with the idealization of his authorship, neither Spenser's nor Jonson's "publication process" provides a clear precedent.

Spenser's "publication process" was at least partly inspired by Chaucer's career in print, as it began to be managed by William Caxton shortly after he ushered England into the age of mechanical reproduction.⁷ Jonson would have seen how a folio could lend impressive shape and substance to a writer's life during his visits to William Stansby's printing house. As actors in a playing company, Heminge and Condell had at one time or another probably mouthed the words to a number of prologues that promoted a particular play and its author. Nevertheless, the text on which their 1623 performance is based is not unique to the theatre. Rather, it looks back to and derives many of its lines from a substantive tradition that originated not in the playhouse, but in the London book trade at a point when it began to play an active role in the commodification of drama and dramatic authorship. Examining an early phase of this tradition will provide us with some perspective on seventeenth-century efforts to materialize, embody, and commodify early modern drama – and its authorship – through publication.

If the playhouse and the printing house had to cooperate before the idea of the First Folio could become a reality, such cooperation is difficult to reconcile with Andrew Gurr's assertion that, "the companies that bought the plays were actively hostile to the idea of printing them . . . There was no reason to make the product durable or to record it for future generations. So the plays lived in a medium as ephemeral as the sounds through which they came to life."⁸ Similarly D. F. McKenzie claims that in the early seventeenth century there was "a professional *disjunction* of play-wrights and printers . . . print was not the proper medium for plays."⁹ McKenzie himself admits that, "the textual models we have adopted for the drama reflect only the commercial opportunism of printers in the early seventeenth century, a time when the theatre was alive and confident of its own distinctively oral and visual mode."¹⁰ But the text of Jonson's folio, of Shakespeare's Folio, indeed, the texts of any number of quarto editions of plays tell very different stories in which printers and playwrights, and sometimes players, worked together to introduce plays to new and different markets. There may have been opportunism at the heart of such early seventeenth-century efforts to market drama, but it is hard to see such efforts as anything but joint business ventures in which the primary function of the author was his capacity to give a commodity a minimum of recognition and value. In this sense, Foucault's oft-quoted claim that, "[t]ext, books, and discourses really began to have authors . . . to the extent that authors became subject to punishment, that is, to the extent that discourses could be transgressive,"¹¹ can't quite be right either.

In the specific case of the 1623 Folio, the author that emerges is anything but transgressive, and Heminge and Condell make this clear, at least rhetorically, when they assure the reader that, "these Playes have had their triall alreadie, and stood out all Appeales; and do now come forth quitted rather by a Decree of Court" (15–16). This image of innocent plays sets the stage for the subsequent image of the author as "a happie imitator of Nature" and "a most gentle expresser" (28), but it does not cohere well with Foucault's notion of transgressive discourse. Bristol asserts that,

it is clear that those who invented the theatre had specific interests of their own, most notably an interest in economic survival . . . all the principals in these enterprises were entirely indifferent to the possibility either of subversion of state power or of its affirmation. The political outlook of the shareholders was more likely to be linked to a preoccupation with their right to enjoy the profits of their own labor.¹²

No doubt it was precisely this right that shareholders had in mind when, as Orgel observes, they "commissioned the play, usually stipulated the

subject, often provided the plot, often parceled it out, scene by scene, to several playwrights.”¹³ The diary kept by the theatrical entrepreneur, Philip Henslowe, in which he recorded his dealings with London companies, players, and playwrights from 1592 to 1604, provides ample evidence for Orgel’s observation. Nevertheless, Henslowe’s diary also suggests that the early modern London playhouse was a rather busy place that had no space for the “coming into being of the notion of ‘author’” or time for “the privileged moment of *individualization* in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy, and the sciences” that this authorial notion constituted.

Although we do not know whether it was the King’s Men or a father-son printing business that commissioned the “Booke” that would broadcast the death of the author even as it materially gave birth to the author’s individualization, it does seem clear that the “Booke” got the two companies together, and that their motive for cooperating to produce it was anything but metaphysical. In the particular case of the 1623 Folio, Roger Stoddard’s assertion that, “[w]hatever authors do, they do not write books,”¹⁴ is only half the story. The other half is that, whatever else the Folio did, it did write Shakespeare’s authorship by giving shape to and rendering legible a set of discourses that required an author to make the “Booke” a marketable commodity. Indeed, as Feather observes more generally, “[t]he professional author, like the professional publisher, is a product of the age of the printed book.”¹⁵ Furthermore, if we move back in the history of printed drama in England from the Folio’s appearance in the marketplace to the points at which Foucault’s “punishment” or McKenzie’s “*disjunction*” began to emerge, we find neither the “coming into being of the notion of ‘author’” nor a conflict between printers and playwrights. Rather, in both cases we find the seeds being planted for a set of collaborations that would make published dramatic texts and, consequently, dramatic authorship possible.

With regard to the transgressive author, this historical retracing of steps begins with the Privy Council under Edward VI, a legislative body that seems to have been unaware of or indifferent to a rift between printers and playwrights. Indeed, as Greg Walker observes, “[a]lthough the introduction of printing may have had a considerable impact upon the availability of dramatic texts to both actors and readers, it is clear that its impact upon the perceptions of the political authorities was initially far less powerful . . . Their response to drama on the printed page was largely to ignore it, even in situations where one might expect them to have acted.”¹⁶ In April of 1551, a Royal Proclamation seeking to expand existing Acts against “Beggars and Vagabonds” took aim at “vagabondes, tellers of newes, sowers of sedicious rumours, players, and

printers without license, and divers other disordered persons,"¹⁷ forbidding them from engaging in their respective specialties and threatening them with fines and imprisonment. Clearly there was no feasible method for licensing "tellers of newes, sowers of sedicious rumours," or "divers other disordered persons," for that matter; but the syntactic ambiguity of the phrase "players, and printers without license" makes it unclear whether players could be licensed, or only printers. As if anticipating this minor interpretive crisis, the proclamation adds the following sentence:

Nor that any common players, or other persons, upon like paines, do play thenglish tong, any manner Enterlude, Play or matter, without they have special licence to shew for the same, in writing under his majesties signe, or signed by vi. of his highness privie counsaill.¹⁸

Thus was born what Richard Dutton identifies as "the first definite attempt to institute a formal system of licensing of materials to be performed, which implicitly also meant censorship."¹⁹ Print, according to McKenzie, may not have been "the proper medium for plays" in the early seventeenth century, but in the middle of the sixteenth century – one hundred years after its invention – both the printed page and the stage were considered improper enough to be grouped together in the same regulatory paradigm.²⁰

Two years later, within months of Mary I's accession, an edict promising "Freedom of Conscience" again brought the press and the theatre together, and added "Religious Controversy" to the group.²¹ Hoping perhaps to clarify the ambiguous phrasing of the earlier Act, the Proclamation of 18 August 1553 moved the position of the reference to licensing up to the front and shifted the objects of its concern from persons to things. The resulting Act, "Prohibiting Religious Controversy, Unlicensed Plays, and Printing," aspired to the "reformation of busy meddlers in matters of religion, and for redress of preachers, printers, and players," and claimed to be motivated by Mary's remembrance of "what great inconvenience and dangers have grown to this her highness' realm in time past through the diversity of opinions in questions of religion."²² Declaring it "well-known" that there are

evil-disposed persons which take upon them without sufficient authority to preach and to interpret the word of God after their own brain in churches and other places both public and private, and also by playing of interludes and printing of false fond books, ballads, rhymes, and other lewd treatises in the English tongue,²³

the proclamation then announced its *raison d'être*:

Her highness therefore straightly chargeth and commandeth all and every her said subjects of whatsoever state, condition, or degree they be, that none of them presume from henceforth to preach, or by way of reading in churches or other

public or private places (except in the schools of the universities) to interpret or teach any Scriptures or any manner points of doctrine concerning religion; neither also to print any books, matter, ballad, rhyme, interlude, process, or treatise, nor to play any interlude except they have her grace's special license in writing for the same.²⁴

Dedicated to eliminating *in utero* the birth of what Jürgen Habermas would describe as the “domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed,”²⁵ the third Royal Proclamation of Mary's reign was powered by fear of the public sphere, and the locus of its anxiety in the first few months of England's compulsory return to Catholicism was the unholy trinity of preaching, printing, and playing. Moreover, the division glimpsed here between the propriety of the “schools of the universities” and the impropriety of “other public or private spaces” may have laid the foundation for subsequent attitudes toward playing and playwrights, exemplified most famously by Thomas Nashe's letter “To the Gentlemen Students of Both Universities.” Nashe distinguishes between “how eloquent our gowned age is grown of late” and “the servile imitation of vain glorious tragedians,”²⁶ between the university stage and the public playhouse. The proclamation's distinction between what is allowed in universities but not elsewhere is further emphasized by its concern over what gets printed and subsequently read in the vernacular. Taking care, like the previous proclamation of 1551, to specify its anxiety over the “playing of interludes and printing of false fond books, ballads, rhymes, and other lewd treatises in the English tongue,” the 1553 Act intimates that academic Latin plays as well as lewd treatises written in Latin do not pose a threat to the realm.

Recent studies by Frederick Kiefer and Bryan Crockett have explored in considerable depth the historical, metaphorical, thematic, rhetorical, and even gestural links between playing and printing, and playing and preaching, respectively. Within the limited context of mid-sixteenth-century regulatory concerns, however, initial governmental efforts to license plays and players simply failed to register the “professional *disjunction* of play-wrights and printers” that has been a premise of so many scholarly and editorial approaches to printed drama since the early New Bibliographical studies of Pollard and Greg. Rather, printing and playing pose equal threats within Edward's and Mary's successive legislative efforts to maintain order in their realms. Furthermore, the word “playwright” never appears in either of the proclamations examined above, nor does the word “author,” for that matter. Instead, as the 1553 proclamation's consistent use of infinitive verbs such as “to preach,” “to interpret,” “to print,” and “to play” suggests, it is the proscribed activities themselves – not their actors – that disturb the monarch's sleep.

Authorship enters into the regulatory picture two years later in a Royal Proclamation, “Enforcing Statute against Heresy; Prohibiting Seditious and Heretical Books,” which promises “a great punishment” for “the authors, makers, and writers of books containing wicked doctrine and erroneous and heretical opinions contrary to the Catholic faith and determination of the holy church,”²⁷ but there is no reference to plays, interludes, or playing.

Playwrights do finally get some recognition in a Special Commission of 24 December 1581, which granted Edward Tilney enough power to take on the role of state censor of drama, but the reference is somewhat ambiguous. Providing Tilney with the authority to hire workers to perform his court duties, the Commission also authorized him

to warne commaunde and appointe in all places within this our Realme of England, aswell within franchises and liberties as without, all and every plaier or plaiers with their playmakers, either belonginge to any noble man or otherwise, bearinge the name or names of usinge the facultie of playmakers or plaiers of Comedies, Tragedies, Enterludes or whatever other showes soever, from tyme to tyme and at all tymes to appeare before him with all such plaies, Tragedies, Comedies or showes as they shall in readines or meane to sett forth.²⁸

It can probably be assumed that the term “playmaker” here refers to what we would call “playwright.” Nevertheless, the following table of title page and Stationers’ Register attributions for first editions of plays written and published during the decade leading up to the Special Commission indicates that the use of the verb “to make” for authorship is rare, appearing only twice before the 1581 ruling, once after; and none of them made it into the Stationers’ Register.

It is at least conceivable that “playmaker” refers to one who makes a play in the sense of one who produces or subsidizes a play. Henslowe, who mentions a number of playwrights by name, relies only on phrases such as “in earneste of a boocke” or “in pt of payment for a booke” to indicate that a given name or set of names has been paid for the writing of a play. Words like “author,” “playwright,” and “playmaker” never appear.

A subsequent 22 June 1600 Privy Council order seeking to redress “bothe the greatest abuses of the plaies and plaienge houses,” reduced the licensed public theatres to “two houses and noe more allowed to serve for the use of the Common Stage Plaies,” ordered that the “two severall Companies of Plaiers assigned vnto the two howses allowed maie play each of them in there severall howse twice a weeke and noe oftener,” and threatened “[c]ommittinge to prison the owners of Plaiehous and players as shall disobey & resist these orders.”²⁹ Although Janet Clare asserts that censorship “is perhaps the most potent external force which

Date	Title	Title-Page Attribution	Stationers' Register
1569	Patient Grissil The Longer thou Livest the More Fool thou Art The Disobedient Child The Marriage of Wit and Science	Compiled by John Phillips Compiled by W. Wager Compiled by Thomas Ingelend	Compiled by John Phillips
1571	Damon and Pithias	<i>Made</i> by Maister Edwards	
1573	Free-Will	Wrytten fyrst in Italian by FNB, and translated into Englishe by Henry Cheecke	
1575	Gammar Gorton's Needle The Tide Tarrieth No Man	<i>Made</i> by Mr. S. Mr of Art Compiled by George Wapull	
1577	All for Money 1&2 Promus and Cassandra The Most Virtuous and Godly Susanna	Compiled by T. Lupton Compiled by George Whetstone Devised by Thomas Churchyard	Compiled by George Whetstone Gathered by Thomas Churchyard
1581	The Entertainment before the French Ambassadors	Collected, gathered, penned & published by Henry Goldweill	Collected, gathered, penned & published by Henry Goldweill
1594	Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay	<i>Made</i> by Robert Greene	

interacts with the creative consciousness,"³⁰ no reference is made in this order to writers, makers, gatherers, devisors, collectors, penners, or compilers.

During the second half of the sixteenth century, the period in which both the professional theatre and the printing of drama emerged, efforts were made to regulate both players and printers. In the 1590s, the Privy Council of London received a number of petitions from the Lord Mayor and/or aldermen calling for the total suppression of the playhouses.³¹ And, of course, legislative attempts to control printers were frequently made by various individuals or groups, especially during periods of religious or political controversy, though ultimately – in the specific case of London – it was the Stationers' Company, according to Feather, that "could and did regulate the production and sale of books in the City."³² Furthermore, although playwrights probably did write transgressive discourses (Jonson and Nashe's *Isle of Dogs* may have been one of them),³³ rarely do these authors seem to have been a major source of anxiety for the rulers and/or legislators who initiated these regulatory

efforts. And finally, there may have been some hostility from time to time between playwrights and printers in the second half of the sixteenth century, but it was not serious enough to warrant the attention of those who sought to monitor and regulate either group. Given all of these qualifications, it is rather remarkable that the first transgressive discourse to benefit from the individualizing authorial potential of punishment was written by a playwright who did more than anyone in his age to make print “the proper medium for plays.” According to Dutton,

Sejanus would seem to be the first occasion on which any dramatist was made to answer *by the government* for his text – that is, treating a play-text as if it were a printed book and treating Jonson as if he were, for example, Dr. Hayward. Indeed, the possibility that the examination followed the *publication* of the play in 1605 rather than its 1603 *performance* should not lightly be discounted.³⁴

The King’s Men, the playing company that staged *Sejanus*, “seem not to have been involved in the inquiry,” Dutton adds. If the Privy Council under Edward VI had been unwilling or unable to differentiate between players and printers in 1551, fifty years later the same legislative body was still refusing to cooperate with, to borrow McKenzie’s phrase, “the textual models we have adopted for the drama.” Even Dutton’s use of italics in the passage quoted above typographically tell a tale not of “disjunction,” but one of deliberate conflation in which *publication* and *performance* are fused together *by the government*. Appropriately, Jonson may have used the printed book to elude a regulatory system that was primarily structured to mediate between the playing company and the state, for as Dutton notes, “the pedantic apparatus of sources with which Jonson shrouded the quarto text, protesting (probably too much) the play’s innocence as disinterested history, were an anticipation of trouble rather than a response to his arraignment.”³⁵ In the printed text – the performance text is not extant – that individualized Jonson in the eyes of the Privy Council, a writer of history books named Cordus frets over the future of Pompey’s theatre, is accused of treason, and his books are burnt.³⁶

Jonson himself simultaneously acknowledged the individualizing potential of this transgressive moment and expressed its importance to his emergence as an individualized author in terms of the difference between the stage and the printed page by informing readers of the *Sejanus*, *His Fall* quarto that,

this Booke, in all numbers, is not the same with that which was acted on the publike Stage, wherein a second Pen had good share: in place of which I have rather chosen, to put weaker (and no doubt lesse pleasing) of mine own, then to defraud so happy a Genius of his right, by my lothed usurpation (¶3).

In the specific context of dramatic authorship, this statement represents an important development, and its implications will be considered more fully in Chapter 3.

For Jonson, then, the distance between the playhouse and the printing house was the space of his authorial singularity, a singularity that could only be achieved and maintained in the printed text. If the members of the Privy Council chose to ignore this distance in their search for a transgressive singularity, certainly history was on their side. For it is one of the great, but rarely acknowledged, ironies of scholarship on early modern English drama that both the printing trade, organized and embodied as the Stationers' Company, and the English vernacular dramatic tradition, written and performed at the Inns of Court, came into their own at precisely the same historical moment during the early years of Elizabeth's reign. The Company was incorporated on 4 May 1557, the day its charter of incorporation was officially approved, and by the summer of 1562, "the shape of the Company was clear," according to Cyprian Blagden.³⁷ In that year, the Company fully settled into its new location at Peter's College, Elizabeth confirmed its charter, and city officials granted it the privilege of having its own livery.³⁸ Some five years after being incorporated, the Company had more or less fully emerged as England's primary institution for monitoring and regulating publication. At another guildhall known as the Inner Temple, Norton and Sackville's *Gorboduc* was being performed, and another institution was beginning to take shape.

Until Elizabeth's accession, the majority of the tragedies performed and/or published in London were translated from Greek to Latin by the likes of Roger Ascham (*Philoctetes*, 1543), and Thomas Caius (*The Tragedies of Euripides*, 1550). Beginning in 1558, however, with the performance of Seneca's *Thebais*,³⁹ translated into English by Thomas Browne, a number of "Englished" Senecan plays appeared one after the other in the first five years of Elizabeth's reign.⁴⁰ It is impossible to determine for certain what motivated this significant spate of interest in translating Seneca,⁴¹ but it is not difficult to speculate how Browne's translation of *Thebais*, and its subsequent performance, might have encapsulated the Inns of Court's views on the Elizabethan succession. The play's treatment of the final dynastic crisis of the House of Cadmus would have resonated in the legalistic mind of England's juridical body with the Tudor dynasty, and even the specifics of the Tudor succession from one sister to another are mirrored in the play's depiction of a succession struggle between two brothers.

By 1562, however, the proliferation of "Englished" Senecas abated just long enough for Norton and Sackville's *Gorboduc* to be performed at the

Inner Temple. *Gorboduc*, like Seneca's *Thebais* four years earlier, also tells the story of a succession struggle between brothers. The importance of this performance cannot, perhaps, be overstated. As Walker observes, "Gorboduc is rightly considered a landmark in English literary history. As the earliest extant five-act verse tragedy in English, the earliest attempt to imitate Senecan tragic form in English, the earliest surviving English drama in blank verse, and the earliest English play to adopt the use of dumb-shows preceding each act, it offers itself as a point of departure for much of the Renaissance dramatic experimentation of the following decades."⁴² Moreover, in the case of *Gorboduc* there is no longer any cause to speculate about how it was received because a recently discovered manuscript in the British Library's Yelverton collection preserves one audience member's impressions of the play's premiere performance in January of 1562.⁴³ Indicating that, "[t]here was a tragedie played in the Inner Temple of the two brethren Porrex and Ferrex K of Brytayne," the viewer/proto-New Historicist critic recalls "that many things were saied [in the play] for the Succesion to put things in certenty."⁴⁴ Commenting on this rare extant eyewitness account of a play in performance, Norman Jones and Paul Whitfield White assert that *Gorboduc* is "an object lesson in what happens if the problems of marriage and succession are not solved."⁴⁵ For Walker, *Gorboduc* is the first play "deliberately to intervene in [the] ongoing debate about the queen's marriage plans and the future of the realm."⁴⁶

In the same year that the Stationers' Company emerged as the primary institution for monitoring and regulating the London book trade, the first home-grown English tragedy was sating London's still limited appetite for the genre by successfully adapting Senecan tragic conventions to English topical matters (specifically Elizabeth's marital and reproductive choices). If the first performance of *Gorboduc* and the ratification of the Company's charter by city and crown were, in fact, parallel moments of historical importance, the chronological convergence of page and stage that I have sketched in here would be nothing more than a coincidence. What does, however, seem significant is that the publication history of *Gorboduc* sets playhouse and printing house on a collision course which, though it remains largely misinterpreted in the textual scholarship on printed drama, will ultimately produce the 1623 Folio and, consequently, the notion we have of Shakespeare as an author.

Published initially on 22 September 1565, the title page of the first printed octavo edition (Fig. 1),⁴⁷ is slightly more crowded with print than, say, the title page of the quarto edition of *Titus Andronicus* (Fig. 2) published three decades later. Nevertheless, it is strikingly similar to



Figure 1 Title page: *The Tragedie of Gorboduc*, 1565

hundreds of extant title pages of early modern dramatic texts that would be printed over the next seventy-five years. All the information that would become standard for title pages of printed plays can be found in the proper place. The title, “THE / TRAGEDIE OF GORBODVC,” appears at the top of the page, facts of publication and sale appear at the bottom:

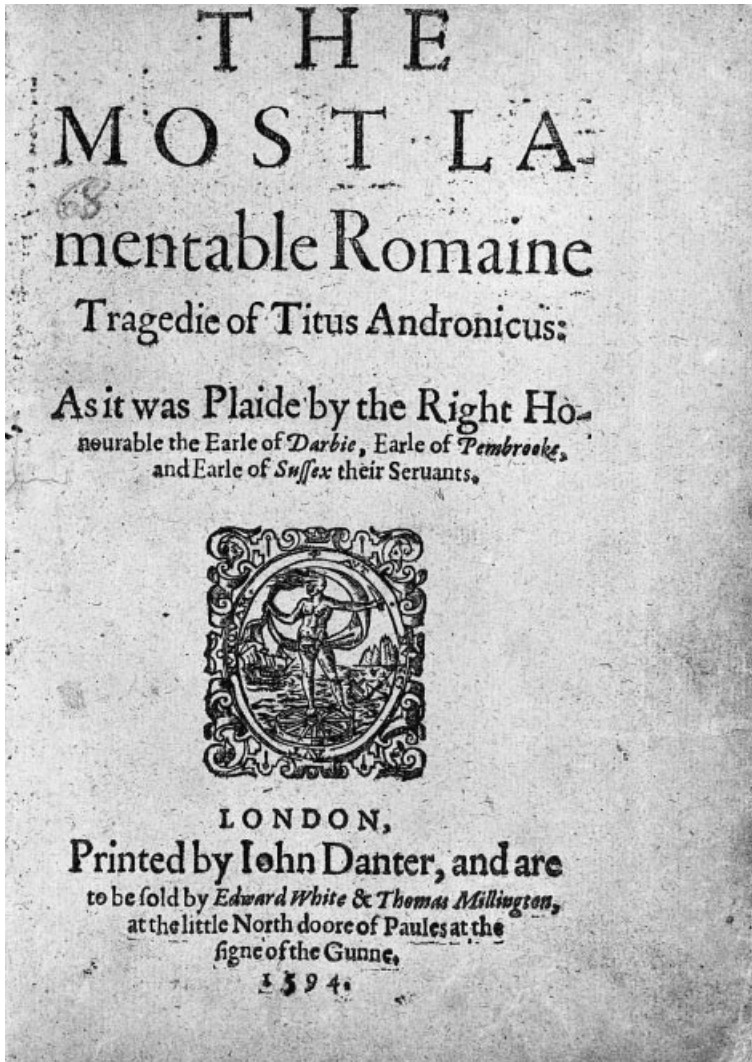


Figure 2 Title page: *The Most Lamentable Romaine Tragedie of Titus Andronicus*, 1594

IMPRYNTE AT LONDON / in Fletestrete, at the Signe of the / Faucon by
William Griffith: And are / to be sold at his Shop in Saincte / Dunstones
 Churchyarde in / the West of London. / Anno, 1565. *Septemb. 22.*

Above the emblem that dominates the center of the page, the particulars of the play's performance, as well as an indication of the printed text's fidelity to that performance, are provided :

Sett forthe as the same was shewed before the / QVENES most excellent Maiestie, in her highnes / Court of Whitehall, the xviiiij day of January, / Anno Domini. 1561. By the Gentlemen / of Thynner Temple in London.

Thus, the “*disjunction*” of printers and playwrights is represented here spatially as a kind of balance of power by the emblem that separates the two activities that have converged to make the printed dramatic text possible. Nearly all extant dramas printed subsequently would follow this format on their title pages. There is something truly extraordinary about this title page though, something that would not be replicated afterward. Just below the play's title appears an astonishingly precise statement about the play's authorship: “whereof three Actes were wrytten by / *Thomas Nortone*, and the two laste by / *Thomas Sackuyle*.” It would be difficult to exaggerate the singularity of such an attribution, and the mind boggles at how much scholarly labor might have been spared if all subsequent dramas had been so precisely attributed.⁴⁸

When a second octavo edition (O2)⁴⁹ of the play is published five years later, the title page (Fig. 3) has undergone a radical transformation. The balance of power noted on the previous title page has been undone, and the locus of authority for the publication has been snatched away from the authors.⁵⁰ The careful ascription to Norton and Sackville has been removed, ostensibly compelling the play to join the ranks of the roughly 150 extant plays from the period that were published anonymously; in its place are proffered the two names of the play's new title: “The Tragidie of Ferrex / and Porrex.” Where once prospective readers were informed that the play they were about to buy was “Sett forthe as the same was shewed,” now they are assured that this new edition has been “set forth without addition or alte- / ration but altogether as the same was shewed / on stage before the Queenes Maiestie, / about nine yeares past.” The increased promotion here of the printed play's fidelity to a single performance is oddly juxtaposed with the vagueness of the phrase “about nine yeares past.” Where once an emblem ran interference between stage and page, now a single, ambiguous phrase, “Seen and allowed,” indicates the presence of a new locus of authority, though it isn't exactly clear what it is that has been “Seen and allowed.”⁵¹ The performance? The text? The title page? Certainly, the emblem that was displaced has been

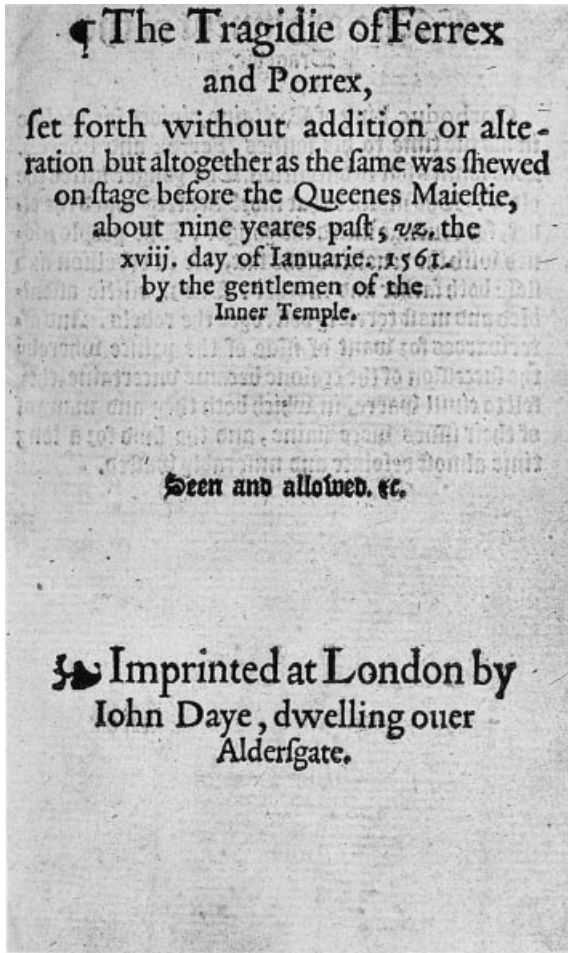


Figure 3 Title page: *The Tragidie of Ferrex and Porrex*, 1570

seen and not allowed. At the bottom of the page, publication information is provided, though in a greatly reduced form. The play, we are informed, has been “Imprinted at London by / Iohn Daye, dwelling ouer / Aldersgate.” No “Signe” for identifying the printing house is offered, nor is there any information as to where the play may be purchased. We know merely that a printer named John Daye, the only proper name on

the title page, dwells over Aldersgate. We also know, according to a 13 December 1572 letter written by Archbishop Parker, that Daye had previously complained,

that dwellinge in a corner, and his brotherne [members of the Stationers' Company] envienge him, he cannot vtter his bookes which lie in his hande[s] ij or iij thousand powndes worthe, his frendes have procured of Powles a lease of a little shop to be sett vp in the [Paul's Cross] Church yearde, and it is confermed. And what by the instant request of sum enuiose booksellers, the maior and Aldermen will not suffer him to sett it vp in the Church yearde, wherein they have nothing to Doe but by power [i.e. force].⁵²

In short, Daye, who had been involved in the printing and/or publishing of hundreds of books and pamphlets since 1546, was in a rather embattled position within the London community of printers and booksellers at about the time he printed the second octavo edition of Norton and Sackville's play.

Doing business in the marketplace of print changed dramatically with the incorporation of the Stationers' Company a decade after Daye began operating a press, and although he was the first printer to be issued a patent by Elizabeth shortly after her accession,⁵³ by the time his patron, the archbishop, was compelled to write on his behalf some thirteen years later, things were no longer going his way. Stranded in a "corner," and stuck with two or three thousand pounds' worth of unsold books – many of which he may have been given the privilege to compile at *his own expense* a decade earlier – Daye clearly had powerful friends and equally "force"ful enemies. Indeed, as Blayney observes with reference to Parker's letter, "It is worth wondering whether [the booksellers'] objections were indeed prompted by envy, or whether Daye's chosen site (probably in the Atrium) lay in front of existing sheds."⁵⁴ If, as Blayney intimates, Daye was planning to build his bookshop in front of existing shops, thereby preventing them from uttering their books, then it is quite likely that he was the subject of considerable resentment within at least a small group of his fellow stationers. Furthermore, as the following table indicates, of the forty-six items that Daye printed and/or published during the two-year period in which he would have been working on O2, eleven of those works were attributed to Norton, and *Ferrex and Porrex* was the penultimate.⁵⁵

Having committed himself to printing or reprinting the bulk of Norton's oeuvre, Daye clearly had a lot at stake in deciding to produce a second edition of England's first tragedy. And it is at least probable that Norton's books were among those "which lie in his hande[s] ij or iij thousand powndes worthe" a year or so later.

Thus the birth, or perhaps the second coming, of English vernacular

Title	Author	Date	STC	Frmt.
1569 A discourse touching the pretended matche betwene the duke of Norfolk and the queene of Scottes.	[attrib. to T. Norton, T. Sampson, or Walsingham]	1569?	13869?	8□
[anr. ed.]	<i>ibid</i>	1569?	13870	8□
A warning agaynst the dangerous practises of papistes. [see 18686–1570]	Thomas Norton?	1569?	18685.3	8□, 4s
[anr. issue] Sene and allowed.	Thomas Norton?	1569	18685.7	8□, 4s
1570 All such treatises as haue been lately published by T. Norton. [6 pts.]	Thomas Norton	1570	18677	8□
A bull [Noveritis quod anno] graunted by the pope to doctor Harding and other. [14 Aug. 1567]	Thomas Norton	1570	18677.5	2□ (2)
[anr. ed.]	Thomas Norton	1570	18678	8□, 4s
An addition declaratorie to the bulles. Scene [sic] and allowed. [2nd bull is Regnans in excelsis]	Thomas Norton	1570	18678a	8□, 4s
[anr. ed.] Seen and allowed.	Thomas Norton	1570	18678a.5	8□, 4s
A disclosing of the great bull [“An answer to the Bull” ent. 1569–70]	Thomas Norton	1570	18679	8□, 4s
The Tragidie of Ferrex and Porrex, set forth without addition or alteration, but altogether as the same was shewed on stage before the Queenes Maiestie, about nine yeares past.	Thomas Norton	1570	18685	8□, 4s
[A warning against the dangerous practises of papists; anr. ed. of 18685.3–1569; signed “T. Norton”] Newly perused and encreasced [sic].	Thomas Norton	1570?	18686	8□, 4s

tragedy seems to have been tainted by the mundane, workaday, squabbles of the marketplace, and I think it is in this context that Daye’s astonishing preface to O2, “The P.[rinter] to the Reader” (A2), should be read. Taking up an entire page and placed between two pages offering “The argument of the / Tragedie” and “The names of the Speakers,” respectively, the rhetoric of the preface simultaneously recalls the “Church yearde” imbroglio – “his brotherne envieng him” – reported in the archbishop’s letter and foreshadows the central conflict of the play itself, a succession feud between two “brotherne.” Daye informs prospective customers that the printed play they hold in their hands was once part “of the grand Christmas in the Inner Temple,” and he assures them that although it was “first written about nine years ago by the right

honorable now Lord Buckhurst, and by T. Norton,” it was “never intended by the authors thereof to be published.” Next he warns the reader that a previous edition of the play was produced by a contemptible printer who “entised into his house a faire maide and done her villanie, and after all to-bescratched her face, torne her apparel, berayed and disfigured her, and then thrust her out of doors dishonested” (A2r). Thus does Daye’s preface introduce an early generation of readers of printed English vernacular drama to the discourse of textual piracy, conceptually and thematically paving the way for the “*disjunction*” between playwrights and printers of which McKenzie finds evidence in the seventeenth century.⁵⁶ In the space of only a few lines, Daye essentially rehearses all of the main issues that would eventually constitute the foundation of twentieth-century bibliographic, editorial, and scholarly approaches to dramatic texts produced in early modern England. There is the privileging of a theatrical manuscript over a corrupt printed text and the assertion that the authors – to borrow from Gurr’s observation quoted above – “were actively hostile to the idea of printing” their play. Then there is the allegation of textual piracy that will come to be one of the central tenets of the New Bibliography’s project to produce moralizing narratives about the inauthorial status of dramatic texts.

Using Daye’s preface to his edition of *Ferrex and Porrex* as one of her principal examples, Wendy Wall has recently argued that,

[i]n the early modern period, writers, printers, and compilers rethought manuscript authority and printed literary wares through a wealth of tropes, forms, and textual apparatuses; as a result they devised a language of justification and disavowal that activated various gendered dynamics and subsequently promoted gendered models of Renaissance authorship.⁵⁷

Because this “language of justification and disavowal” and the “various gendered dynamics” it activated are the primary focus of Wall’s study, she locates Daye’s preface in a “rhetoric of disclosure that other writers use so easily,” one in which “all hint at the titillating possibilities for figuring publication when they describe how their passions were so indecorously made public.”⁵⁸ Daye is not, of course, the play’s writer, but the distinction between printer and writer gets conflated in Wall’s account, and she does not identify Daye as either the author of the prefatory text or the printer of the edition in the three pages she devotes to examining the rhetoric of the play’s preface. Referring instead to Anthony Scoloker, who “mocks the publishing author who feigns postures of reluctance or fear,” she begins her treatment of the 1570 text by asserting that “Scoloker could easily have been commenting on the

introductory language used in Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton's *Gorboduc* (1570)."⁵⁹

What is perhaps most instructive about Wall's discussion of this complex foundational moment in the history of printed drama for my limited purposes in this chapter is her handling of the identities of the two men who printed the first and second editions of England's first vernacular tragedy. Indeed, early on she provides the proper names of the two authors who had little or nothing to do with the text's publication, but never names or identifies the two printers whose conflict has fueled much speculation about the alleged piracy of play-texts. In this inconsistency alone, her analysis illustrates how the relation between printing house and playhouse has often been obscured. For this reason it bears quoting at length:

The *stationer* opens this work by comparing the text's previous corrupt printing to a ravished virgin. In his address, the scenes of writing and reading are fraught with images of sexual violation and wantonness. In particular he condemns the *irresponsible printer* who put the book forth . . . The *stationer* first uses the metaphor of the ravished maiden to describe the text's victimization: she has been ruined by the *vicious printer* who rakishly seduced and abandoned her. In the latter part of his preface, however, the *publisher* begins to attribute the text's "wantonness" to her inability to stay within chaste boundaries . . . As the *stationer* draws out this analogy, he shifts the blame from the *rapist printer* to the wanton text . . . The *publisher* concludes his preface by simultaneously declaring the woman/text "loosed" once again and by urging the reader to follow the authors' lead and reprivatize the book within the safety of the home . . . In this extraordinary preface, the *publisher* calls up the image of sexual violation to describe the text's emergence into the public eye . . . By boasting that the *author* has "re-dressed" and redeemed the text by re-establishing her "forme," the *publisher* titillates his audience with the image of the text in its previously disheveled state (emphasis added).⁶⁰

Paraphrasing the text of Daye's preface, Wall labels Griffith, the printer of the 1565 octavo edition of *Gorboduc*, an "irresponsible printer," a "vicious printer," and a "rapist printer." Alternatively, Wall consistently refers to Daye as a "stationer" a "publisher," and even an "author," labels that would seem to be somewhat at odds with the title of the preface, "The P. to the Reader." The initial "P." is taken by most editors to be an abbreviation of publisher, though the distinction between printer and publisher had not yet stabilized. As Laurie E. Maguire notes, "sixteenth- and seventeenth-century epistles to printed texts, headed 'From the Printer to the Reader,' often mean from 'From the Publisher to the Reader,' 'printer' being used simply in the sense of 'the one who caused the text to be printed.'"⁶¹

In fact, Griffith was himself a stationer in quite good standing at the

time, one of some forty printers who entered their texts “for his license for pryntinge” during the period – 22 July 1564 to 22 July 1566 – that *Gorboduc* was first being irresponsibly violated, victimized, and ravished. Furthermore, Griffith entered twenty-six different works for licensing by the Stationers’ Company,⁶² and yet his name never once appears among the list of ninety-two names of printers who, during the same period, were forced by the Company to pay “fynes for brakynge of good orders.” Alternatively, Daye printed and/or published only twenty works during the same period, none of which is individually entered for license, and the Stationers’ Register indicates that he was fined “for mysvsyng of master [the] warden.”⁶³ And it is worth noting that Griffith’s 1565 edition also seems to have been “seen and allowed” by the Stationers’ Company because it received the following entry in the Company’s register: “Receved of Wylliam greffeth for his lycense for pryntinge of a Trag[e]die of GORBODUC where[of] iij actes were Wretten by Thomas norton and the laste by Thomas Sackvyle.”⁶⁴ Beneath this entry, however, Arber endorses Daye’s version of events by adding the following note: “This is the surreptitious edition of *Ferrex and Porrex*, the first printed English Tragedy.”⁶⁵ Arber’s rhetoric here echoes Heminge and Condell’s charge that readers of Shakespeare’s previously printed plays “were abus’d with diverse stolne, and surreptitious copies” (A3r: 23–24). Thus, although Daye was not able to “utter” his books to the customers within Paul’s Churchyard, subsequent readers have been only too willing to listen to him. To do so is to disregard the fact that, as Cauthen notes, “Q1 was not so corrupt that, if corrected, it could not be used for the copy-text for Q2” and that “Q2 omits an eight-line passage, perhaps for political reasons.”⁶⁶ So much for Daye’s claim on the title page that the text has been “set forth without addition or alte- / ration but altogether as the same was shewed / on stage.”

The material details of the play’s printing history necessarily complicate any effort to portray Daye as more upstanding than another allegedly irresponsible and abusive printer – as a stand-in for the absent and indifferent writers who fulfill the paternal responsibilities of the author function. Indeed, Wall’s Daye becomes the Foucauldian “principle of thrift” for a work which, according to the inevitable fate of early modern books, has come to exist in variant forms.

Having acknowledged that the stationer/publisher is “urging the reader to follow the author’s lead and reprivatize the book within the safety of the home,” Wall does not see Daye’s preface as the elaborate and masterful sales pitch that it is. Therefore, she takes him at his word when he asserts that if his edition of the play is not appreciated he “shall wishe that she had taried still at home with me.” We know, of course,