

Shakespeare and the Publication of His Plays

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Abstract

Challenging the accepted view that Shakespeare was indifferent to the publication of his plays by focusing on the economics of the booktrade, examines the evidence that the playing companies resisted publishing their plays, reviews "the publication history of Shakespeare's plays, which suggests that the Lord Chamberlain's Men has a coherent strategy to try to get their playwright's plays into print," and "inquire[s] into what can or cannot be inferred from Shakespeare's alleged involvement (as with the narrative poems) or noninvolvement (as with the plays) in the publication of his writings." Concluding that publishers had little economic incentive to publish drama, calls for renewed attention to Shakespeare's attitude to his plays and their publication.

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IN WHAT S. SCHOENBAUM HAS CALLED Pope's "most influential contribution to Shakespearean biography," the eighteenth-century poet and critic wrote:

Shakespear, (whom you and ev'ry Play-house bill
Style the divine, the matchless, what you will)
For gain, not glory, wing'd his roving flight,
And grew Immortal in his own despight.¹

Pope's lines were no doubt instrumental in reinforcing the opinion, soon to be frozen into dogma, that Shakespeare cared only for that form of publication—the stage—which promised an immediate payoff, while being indifferent to the one that eventually guaranteed his immortality—the printed page. Pope, who counted on his writings, in particular the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* translations, to earn him gain and glory, may well have taken comfort in the fact that his motives, compared to what he took to be Shakespeare's, were relatively noble. Yet Schoenbaum's suspicion that Pope's lines may tell us more about his own than about Shakespeare's attitude has not kept us from perpetuating Pope's opinion. To argue, as Thomas L. Berger and Jesse M. Lander have done as recently as 1999, that Shakespeare "never showed the least bit of interest in being a dramatic author while he lived" is still the accepted view.²

Although this view is widely shared, a dissenting voice tried to make itself heard as long ago as 1965, when Ernst Honigmann suggested that we revise "the modern myth of [Shakespeare's] complete indifference to the printing of his plays."³ If Honigmann's suggestion—in contrast to other theories of his, such as the "early

I am grateful to Peter W. M. Blayney, Douglas Brooks, Donna Hamilton, Richard Waswo, and *Shakespeare Quarterly's* anonymous readers for their incisive comments on earlier versions of this essay.

¹ S. Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare's Lives*, new ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 91; Alexander Pope, "The First Epistle of the Second Book of Horace, Imitated," quoted here from *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*, John Butt, gen. ed., 11 vols. (London: Methuen, 1939–69), 4:199 (ll. 69–72).

² Thomas L. Berger and Jesse M. Lander, "Shakespeare in Print, 1593–1640" in *A Companion to Shakespeare*, David Scott Kastan, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 409. Douglas A. Brooks similarly believes that "Shakespeare seems to have been reluctant to see his plays published" (*From Playhouse to Printing House: Drama and Authorship in Early Modern England* [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000], 9).

³ E.A.J. Honigmann, *The Stability of Shakespeare's Text* (London: Edward Arnold, 1965), 190.

start" chronology, the "lost years" in Catholic Lancashire, and authorial revision—has failed to provoke much debate, this may be because Shakespeareans have not taken seriously what is after all a central component in the publication of playbooks. As Gerald D. Johnson has pointed out, "The economics of the book-trade have been largely ignored by analytical bibliographers and textual critics, whose primary interest is to recover the text of Shakespeare and other key literary figures from the vicissitudes of the printing houses of the period."⁴ Now that Peter Blayney has taken a fresh look at a series of bibliographical *idées reçues* that have been gathering dust for most of the twentieth century, we may be equipped to carry out the project for which Honigmann pleaded several decades ago.⁵

I will first investigate the narratives that have hitherto served to sustain what I take to be a mistaken belief in the players' resistance to the publication of plays. I will then review the publication history of Shakespeare's plays, which suggests that the Lord Chamberlain's Men had a coherent strategy to try to get their playwright's plays into print. Finally, I will inquire into what can or cannot be inferred from Shakespeare's alleged involvement (as with the narrative poems) or noninvolvement (as with the plays) in the publication of his writings.

I

The narratives that have long served to account for the players' alleged reluctance to publish in print—a reluctance overcome only by dire financial need occasioned by plague closings—usually follow one of two lines. E. K. Chambers's opinion can represent the first: "the danger was not so much that readers would not become spectators, as that other companies might buy the plays and act them."⁶ As Blayney, Roslyn L. Knutson, and Richard Dutton have shown, there is no evidence that anything of the sort happened in London except in a couple of exceptional cases.⁷

⁴ Gerald D. Johnson, "Thomas Pavier, Publisher, 1600–25," *The Library*, 6th ser., 14 (1992): 12–50, esp. 13.

⁵ See Peter W. M. Blayney, "The Publication of Playbooks" in *A New History of Early English Drama*, John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan, eds. (New York: Columbia UP, 1997), 383–422.

⁶ E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), 3:183.

⁷ See Blayney, 386; Roslyn L. Knutson, "The Repertory" in Cox and Kastan, eds., 461–80; and Richard Dutton, "The Birth of the Author" in *Elizabethan Theater: Essays in Honor of S. Schoenbaum*, R. B. Parker and S. P. Zitner, eds. (Newark: U of Delaware P; London: Associated University Presses, 1996), 71–92, esp. 72–75. The most famous instance of a theatrical "theft" was the appropriation of Thomas Kyd's *Jeronimo* by the Children of the Chapel and the retaliation by the King's Men with a performance of John Marston's *The Malcontent*: "Why not Malevole in folio with us, as Jeronimo in decimo-sexto with them?" (Induction to *The Malcontent*, ed. George K. Hunter, *The Revels Plays* [London: Methuen, 1975], 13 [ll. 78–79]). For a discussion of the circumstances leading up to this incident, see Lukas Erne, "'Enter the Ghost of Andrea': Recovering Thomas Kyd's Two-Part Play," *English Literary Renaissance* 30 (2000): 339–72, esp. 359–60.

The other reason allegedly keeping the companies from having their plays printed was that the availability of a printed text might reduce attendance at the playhouse. Timothy Murray well exemplifies this line of argument and its possible implications:

Under solvent conditions, the acting companies stored licensed scripts in their archives and withheld them from publication. The theatrical companies believed that the value of a stage play was enhanced by this process, since the surprise and delight of a play's performance would not be diminished by the text's having been widely circulated beforehand. Because printed plays released by the companies were the exception, printers usually acquired manuscripts from dishonest players who reconstructed the text from memory, from patrons the company favored with private transcripts, or even from the authors, who lacked legal authority over the manuscripts they had submitted to the players.⁸

From the licensed manuscripts carefully stored in archives to the dishonest players surreptitiously reconstructing the texts and selling them to publishers, Murray presents a version of what Blayney has called the "stirring melodrama" Pollard first invented and which critics have been reluctant to abandon.⁹ Fredson Bowers promoted this narrative when he wrote that "if the play continued to be popular, the company could withhold it entirely in order to maintain the curiosity of the public."¹⁰ Even Dutton thought it "possible that those who had paid good money for a play were less certain than I can now be that publication would not reduce its value."¹¹ The problem with this argument is that, apart from scholarly tradition, there appears to be no solid grounds on which to base it. It seems on the contrary that a play which fared well in the printing house, such as *The Spanish Tragedy*, also remained exceptionally popular on stage. That the players should not wish to have their plays offered to a stationer by someone else seems plausible enough. That publication at one moment might not be as desirable as publication at another moment also makes sense. It does not follow, however, that publication *per se* was detrimental to the players' interests. Blayney writes that he "know[s] of no evidence that any player ever feared that those who bought and read plays would consequently lose interest in seeing them performed."¹²

⁸ Timothy Murray, *Theatrical Legitimation: Allegories of Genius in Seventeenth-Century England and France* (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987), 35. Murray's point that authors had no legal rights over their texts once they had been sold to the players is incorrect. Unless a contract specifically forbade playwrights to have their plays published, what the acting company acquired from the author was the exclusive right to *perform* the play rather than a copyright in anything resembling its modern sense.

⁹ Blayney, 383.

¹⁰ Fredson Bowers, "The Publication of English Renaissance Plays" in *Elizabethan Dramatists*, Fredson Bowers, ed., *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, 62 (Detroit, MI: Gale Research Company, 1987), 406.

¹¹ Dutton, 75.

¹² Blayney, 386.

Dutton's "The Birth of the Author," which has been said to "shed much new light on the ties that may have bound Shakespeare to the playhouse and kept him out of the printing house,"¹³ deserves closer attention. Exploring the question "Why did Shakespeare not print his own plays?" Dutton suggests, following G. E. Bentley, that "it was the works of contracted 'ordinary poets' that companies were particularly anxious to keep out of print."¹⁴ With regard to Shakespeare and the Lord Chamberlain's Men, this raises the question of why their strategy would have had so little success. If all, or at least most, of his plays have come down to us, Shakespeare seems to have written an average of about two plays per year. Thus, even allowing for revivals, a good many additional plays must have been composed by other playwrights for the Lord Chamberlain's Men. The parallel case of the Lord Admiral's Men is helpful here. In his diary Henslowe's list of performances by the Lord Admiral's Men features a play that is marked as new ("ne") about every two or three weeks, and although Henslowe also appears to have applied this designation to revised and revived plays ("new or marketably new" plays, in Knutson's words¹⁵), the number of new plays was important. Even if the Lord Chamberlain's Men did not commission as many new plays as the Lord Admiral's Men did, Shakespeare cannot have produced more than a fraction of the new dramatic material his company needed. Only eight of the non-Shakespearean plays that we know were written for the Lord Chamberlain's Men between 1594 and 1603 reached print, however: Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour* (Q1601) and *Every Man out of his Humour* (Q1600); Dekker's *Satiromastix* (Q1602); and the anonymous *Mucedorous* (Q1598), *A Warning for Fair Women* (Q1599), *A Larum for London* (Q1602), *Thomas Lord Cromwell* (Q1602), and *The Merry Devil of Edmonton* (Q1608).¹⁶ In comparison, no fewer than twelve of Shakespeare's plays written in the same period had appeared in print by 1603.¹⁷ If the Lord Chamberlain's Men were "particularly anxious" to keep the plays of their "'ordinary poet'" out of print, their endeavors to do so were a spectacular failure.

Thus anyone who argues that the actors were opposed to the publication of playbooks must somehow account for those plays that were printed during Shakespeare's lifetime. The first quartos of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Henry V*, *The Merry*

¹³ Brooks, 56.

¹⁴ Dutton, 71 and 75. See also Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Profession of Dramatist in Shakespeare's Time, 1590–1642* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1971), 264–92.

¹⁵ Knutson, 467.

¹⁶ See Roslyn L. Knutson, "Shakespeare's Repertory" in Kastan, ed., 346–61; and Roslyn L. Knutson, *The Repertory of Shakespeare's Company, 1594–1613* (Fayetteville: U of Arkansas P, 1991).

¹⁷ These figures include *Love's Labor's Won*, an edition of which may have been printed some time before 1603 (see note 39 below), but exclude *Edward III*, of which Shakespeare is likely to have written less than one half and even that, in all probability, before joining the Lord Chamberlain's Men; see Giorgio Melchiori, ed., *King Edward III* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 3–17.

Wives of Windsor, and *Hamlet* (traditionally counted among the “bad quartos”) are editions whose publication Shakespeare is unlikely to have supported. Even if we discount them, however, we are still left with no fewer than thirteen substantive texts printed between 1597 and 1609 which go back to “good” manuscripts. Despite their large number, these texts have often been considered as exceptions to the rule—“breaches,” to employ Dutton’s term¹⁸—for which various explanations can be found. Chambers, for instance, believed that “so long as the companies were prosperous, they kept a tight hold on their ‘books’, and only let them pass into the hands of the publishers when adversity broke them up, or when they had some special need to raise funds.”¹⁹ More specifically, he attributed the spate of plays published in 1600 to “the call for ready money involved by the building of the Globe in 1599 and the Fortune in 1600.”²⁰

Dutton, too, avails himself of an alleged “breach” to account for early publications when he writes that “Andrew Gurr has argued persuasively that the shareholders might have released *Richard III*, *Love’s Labor’s Lost*, and *1 Henry IV* for print in 1597/98 only because they faced a financial crisis when unable to use either the Burbages’ new Blackfriars venue or the Theater.”²¹ This argument needs to be questioned on several accounts. For one, the financial gain from the sales would have been insignificant. Blayney estimates that a stationer paid approximately 30s. for a manuscript.²² In fact, the most precious property a company owned was not play manuscripts but costumes. In 1605, for instance, Edward Alleyn valued his “share of apparell” at £100.²³ Neil Carson’s analysis of Henslowe’s diary makes abundantly clear that companies spent several times more on costumes and staging than on plays.²⁴ If Shakespeare and his colleagues had needed some money in 1598, there would have been easier ways of securing it than by selling manuscripts.

Further, we can be fairly confident that Shakespeare and his fellow shareholders were far from bankrupt in 1598. Theirs had been a thriving business since 1594,

¹⁸ Dutton, 80.

¹⁹ Chambers, 3:184.

²⁰ Chambers, 3:184.

²¹ Dutton, 80.

²² Blayney, 398. W. W. Greg pointed out long ago that “The few shillings that a publisher would have paid for a manuscript can have been no matter of consequence to a thriving company” (*The Editorial Problem in Shakespeare: A survey of the foundations of the text* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1942], 44). On payments for playtexts, see also Roslyn L. Knutson, “The Commercial Significance of the Payments for Playtexts in *Henslowe’s Diary*, 1597–1603,” *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 5 (1991): 117–63.

²³ Chambers, 2:298.

²⁴ “A particularly startling feature of the picture the diary reveals, therefore, is the apparent extravagance of the staging. Compared to £5-00-0 or £8-00-0 paid out for a play, the actors would spend £20-00-0, £30-00-0, or even more on production” (Neil Carson, *A Companion to Henslowe’s Diary* [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988], 78).

especially as the Lord Admiral's Men had been virtually their only competition.²⁵ Though hired players probably remained fairly poor, company shareholders did not. Burbage seems to have left more than £300 to his heirs, and Shakespeare had amassed a handsome fortune before the turn of the century.²⁶ If Shakespeare's plays really did "take on an almost fetishistic significance" and "were, so to speak, the company's family silver, not to be traded in by any of the sharers," it is not clear why Shakespeare and his fellow shareholders should have sold three plays for less than £5 at a time when Shakespeare himself could spare substantially more.²⁷

II

The belief "that acting companies usually considered publication to be against their best interests" is included by Blayney among the "unfounded myths" that have bedeviled Shakespeare scholarship since the 1909 publication of Alfred Pollard's *Shakespeare Folios and Quartos*.²⁸ It may thus be useful to reconsider the publication of Shakespeare's plays without the usual *parti pris* that the company opposed such publication. I will begin by examining the twelve plays that may have been the first written by Shakespeare for the Lord Chamberlain's Men (whom he joined in 1594).²⁹

Four such plays, written in the 1590s, present special problems: *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Henry V*, and, perhaps, *Love's Labor's Lost* each appeared first in what, since Pollard, have usually been labeled "bad" quartos. Each had been set up from a text of which Shakespeare, we may assume, would have preferred the fuller and, in some ways, better version. It may be tempting to argue that because the earliest editions of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet* (written c. 1601), and, possibly, *Love's*

²⁵ See Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage, 1574–1642*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992), 41–49.

²⁶ On Burbage, see Chambers, 2:308. Park Honan discusses Shakespeare's substantial income in the late 1590s, along with his investments in London and Stratford, his holdings in corn, his purchase of New Place, and other evidence of his wealth around the turn of the century (*Shakespeare: A Life* [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999], 225–48).

²⁷ Dutton, 78–79. Cf. Blayney, who has disposed of other alleged breaches to the players' unwillingness to have their plays published. Looking into the publications of 1594—which have often been attributed to the closing of the theaters because of plague—Blayney argues that the "suggestion that the players were motivated by financial hardship is less compelling, partly because the peak period happened *after* rather than during the closure and partly because the sums involved would have been relatively small" (386).

²⁸ Blayney, "Playbooks," 383–84.

²⁹ It should be noted that I do not follow Wells and Taylor in counting *The Comedy of Errors* among the plays written for this company; see Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, with John Jowett and William Montgomery, *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 116–17. It has traditionally been ascribed to an earlier date on good grounds, and R. A. Foakes, in his 1962 Arden2 edition, plausibly argues for "between 1590 and 1593" (xxiii), while T. S. Dorsch, in his 1988 New Cambridge edition, suggests "the summer or autumn of 1591" (6).

Labor's Lost were followed by fuller and "better" versions, this is in itself strong evidence that the Lord Chamberlain's Men and their playwright did care and did intervene.³⁰ The evidence is more complex, however. In the case of *Romeo and Juliet*, John Danter seems to have licensed but not entered the play before printing the 1597 edition.³¹ By 1599, Cuthbert Burby—who had published the (allegedly) "Newly corrected and augmented" *Love's Labor's Lost* a year earlier—appears to have acquired the rights to *Romeo and Juliet* (even though the extant records of the Stationers' Company nowhere mention this) and was in the possession of a "good" manuscript, which he went on to print (though also without entering it).³² What exactly led to this unusual succession of events will never be fully understood. Yet if, as seems likely, the Lord Chamberlain's Men sold the manuscript to Burby, this might well have happened before Danter published his edition rather than because the Lord Chamberlain's Men, troubled by the printing of what modern scholarship has labeled a "bad" quarto, approached a stationer in order to have it superseded by a "good" text.

Similarly, that the "good" manuscript underlying the second quarto of *Hamlet* (1604/5) had changed hands before the "bad" first quarto appeared (1603) is a strong, indeed the strongest, possibility. The play had been entered to James Roberts on 26 July 1602.³³ According to its title page, however, Q1 was "printed [by Valentine Simmes] for N[icholas]. L[ing]. and Iohn Trundell," whereas Q2 was "Printed by I[ames]. R[oberts]. for N[icholas]. L[ing]." While various scenarios have been proposed to account for this, only one is uncomplicated, fits all the evidence, and is consistent with normal book-trade practice: Ling and Trundle seem to have licensed but not entered their manuscript and had it printed without anyone realizing that Roberts had once entered a different version.³⁴ Having found out about Ling and Trundle's unintentional breach, Roberts could have caused them trouble but may have preferred to negotiate an advantageous deal with his neighbors in Fleet Street, selling to Ling and Trundle his longer and better manuscript and having them pay him to print it.

As for *Love's Labor's Lost*, it is far from clear that the first extant edition really did supersede a "bad" one. It is true that the title page of the 1598 quarto describes the text as "Newly corrected and augmented," suggesting that, like Q2 *Romeo and Juliet*

³⁰ For this *post hoc ergo propter hoc* argument, see, for instance, Honigmann, 190; Andrew Gurr, ed., *King Henry V* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992), 217; and Greg, 17.

³¹ While license was mandatory, Blayney has shown that it was not illegal to have a text licensed without paying for the "insurance policy" of entrance in the Stationers' Register (400–405, esp. 404).

³² That Burby was later considered the rightful owner of the rights to *Romeo and Juliet* is born out by the fact that on 22 January 1607 *Romeo and Juliet* was transferred to Nicholas Ling "with consent of Master Burby" (*A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London 1554–1640 A.D.*, ed. Edward Arber, 5 vols. [London: Privately Printed, 1875–94], 3:337).

³³ Arber, 3:212.

³⁴ I am indebted to Peter Blayney for this observation, made in conversation, December 2000.

and *Hamlet*, it superseded a “bad” text. While this has been the traditional view,³⁵ it has been forcefully argued in more recent times that this edition may well have followed (and indeed have been set up from) a “good” edition. What supports this view is that the title page of Q3 *Richard III*, for example, which advertises itself as “newly augmented,” is “demonstrably misleading.”³⁶ Furthermore, according to Paul Werstine’s study of the practices in William White’s printing house, typographical evidence suggests that Q1 *Love’s Labor’s Lost* was set up from printed rather than from manuscript copy, and, consequently, that it was a reprint of the textually “good” Q0.³⁷ Thus, while the evidence is not unambiguous in any of the three cases, it seems more likely that in each case the Lord Chamberlain’s Men sold a “good” manuscript before the publication of the first edition than that there was an active attempt on their behalf to supersede a “bad” text with a “good” one.

On the other hand, when it comes to the two “bad” texts that were not superseded by “good” ones (or at least not until 1623), it will not do to claim that “nothing was done during Shakespeare’s lifetime to replace the bad texts of *Henry V* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.”³⁸ This is more than we know. *Merry Wives*—first printed in a particularly corrupt text, even by the standards of other “bad” quartos—was not reprinted until the publication of the Pavier quartos in 1619. This suggests that this play sold rather poorly. Thus, even if the players had approached the play’s publisher, Arthur Johnson, with a good text, he would have had no reason to print it and invest in a second edition as long as he had not sold the copies of the first.

Of the eight other plays Shakespeare is likely to have written for his company from 1594 until close to the turn of the century, two need to be first addressed: *Love’s Labor’s Won* may well have existed and even have been printed, but because no copy is extant, it is impossible to say anything about the edition except that it would have appeared before 1603.³⁹ *King John* was not printed until the First Folio in 1623, for

³⁵ See, for instance, Greg, 17; and Honigsmann, 190.

³⁶ Wells and Taylor, *Textual Companion*, 270; see also Henry R. Woudhuysen, ed., *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (Walton-on-Thames, UK: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 301–4.

³⁷ See Paul Werstine, “The Editorial Usefulness of Printing House and Compositor Studies” in *Play-Texts in Old Spelling: Papers from the Glendon Conference*, G. B. Shand with Raymond C. Shady, eds. (New York: AMS Press, 1984), 35–64. Werstine’s article is discussed in some detail in Woudhuysen’s Arden3 edition of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (305–6).

³⁸ Michael J. B. Allen and Kenneth Muir, eds., *Shakespeare’s Plays in Quarto* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1981), xviii.

³⁹ On *Love’s Labor’s Won*, see T. W. Baldwin, *Shakespeare’s Love’s Labor’s Won: New Evidence from the Account Books of an Elizabethan Bookseller* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1957); Wells and Taylor, *Textual Companion*, 177; and Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, gen. eds., *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 349. I believe that the evidence suggesting that a now-lost play with this title actually existed is not quite as strong as Baldwin and the Oxford editors think. As is well known, the case for the existence of a now-lost play depends, on the one hand, on Francis Meres’s list in *Palladis Tamia* (1598) of Shakespeare plays and, on the other hand, on a list of printed plays in the

reasons that may have had nothing to do with reluctance on the part of the Lord Chamberlain's Men. *The Troublesome Raigne of Iohn King of England* had been published in 1591 by Sampson Clarke, who would no doubt have considered any edition of *King John* to which he had not consented a breach of his rights. As Blayney explains, "The owner of a copy had not only the exclusive right to reprint the text, but also the right to a fair chance to recover his costs. He could therefore seek the Company's protection if any book—not necessarily a reprint or plagiarism of his own copy—threatened his ability to dispose of unsold copies of an existing edition."⁴⁰ *Troublesome Raigne* was not reprinted until 1611, when, significantly, it was attributed to "W. Sh." When Heminge and Condell wanted to include *King John* and *The Taming of the Shrew* in the First Folio, they first had to obtain the consent of the owners of *Troublesome Raigne* and *The Taming of a Shrew*. The fact that *King John* was not printed until 1623 thus provides no evidence for the players' alleged reluctance to have their plays printed.

The six remaining plays—*Richard II*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *1 Henry IV*, *2 Henry IV*, and *Much Ado About Nothing*—were all printed between 1597 and 1600. Whether or not we believe that Shakespeare and his company were responsible for selling the manuscripts to the publishers will partly depend on our assessment of the nature of printer's copy. In the cases of *Richard II* and *The Merchant of Venice* it appears to have been difficult for those twentieth-century editors who tried to investigate the nature of printer's copy to determine to their own satisfaction whether copy was derived from an authorial manuscript or a faithful transcript of it, while, according to their investigations, *1 Henry IV* may well have been set up from a scribal transcript of an authorial manuscript.⁴¹ Copy for the

account books of an Elizabethan bookseller, datable to 1603. While it had long been believed that *Love's Labor's Won* was simply an alternative title for a comedy that Shakespeare had written by 1598, Baldwin's discovery and discussion of the 1603 list of printed plays seemed to make this position untenable. This need not be so. As neither Baldwin nor Wells and Taylor have pointed out, not all the titles in the bookseller's list reproduce the title of the printed play. *Edward IV*, published in 1599 as *The First and Second Parts of King Edward the Fourth* and reprinted in 1600 under the same title, is referred to as "Jane Shore." To call this a "shortened title," as Baldwin does, will not quite do, as "Jane Shore" is not part of the full title. On the other hand, *Edward IV* appears to be referred to as "Jane Shore" in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607; see Chambers, 4:11). *Edward IV*, in other words, seems to have been commonly called "Jane Shore" just as *Henry VIII* seems to have been known as "All is True" before 1623. "Love's Labor's Won" might thus have been another such popular title for *Much Ado About Nothing*, the only play that fulfills all the necessary conditions: the title is not mentioned by Meres, the play had been published by 1603, and it may have been performed before *Palladis Tamia* was entered on 7 September 1598. I am indebted to a conversation with Peter Blayney in December 2000 about this issue.

⁴⁰ Blayney, 399.

⁴¹ See David Bevington, ed., *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, 4th ed. (New York: Longman, 1997), A-4 and A-10-11; G. Blakemore Evans, gen. ed., *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2d ed. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 57-58; Stephen Greenblatt et al., eds., *The Norton Shakespeare, Based*

first quartos of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *2 Henry IV*, and *Much Ado About Nothing*, on the other hand, has generally been believed to have come from Shakespeare's own manuscripts.⁴² It is true that the canons of bibliographical proof have lately been subjected to scrutiny.⁴³ Nevertheless, while it would be unwise to claim the ability to discover the precise origin and nature of these manuscripts, nothing seems to contradict the interpretation that any one of them may (though not necessarily all of them must) have been in the possession of the Lord Chamberlain's Men and/or their playwright before being sold to a stationer.

What emerges is the probability that the Lord Chamberlain's Men did not try to have Shakespeare's plays printed immediately after they were written. If we consider the likely dates of composition and the dates of entrance in the Stationers' Register, a fairly consistent pattern presents itself: as a rule, roughly two years seem to have elapsed between the former and the latter. *Richard II*, usually dated 1595,⁴⁴ was entered in the Stationers' Register on 29 August 1597. *Henry IV, Part 1* and *The Merchant of Venice*, both probably of 1596–97, were entered on 25 February 1598 and 22 July 1598, respectively; *2 Henry IV*, composed late in 1597 or early 1598, and *Much Ado About Nothing*, probably written in late 1598 or early 1599, are first mentioned in the Stationers' Register in August 1600.⁴⁵ Little seems to have changed when we come to *Troilus and Cressida* and *King Lear*, the two remaining plays (aside from the corrupt text of *Pericles*) printed during Shakespeare's lifetime. *Troilus and*

on the Oxford edition (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1997), 950, 1089, and 1155; and Wells and Taylor, *Textual Companion*, 306, 323, and 329.

⁴² See Bevington, ed., A-4–5 and A-11; Greenblatt et al., eds., 812, 1302, and 1387; Wells and Taylor, *Textual Companion*, 279, 351, and 371; Peter Holland, ed., *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 113; René Weis, ed., *Henry IV, Part 2* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 90; and Giorgio Melchiori, ed., *The Second Part of King Henry IV* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), 53. Regarding *Much Ado About Nothing*, the 1993 Oxford editor of that play, Sheldon P. Zitner, less categorically believes that "The 1600 Quarto [of *Much Ado*] was set from the author's manuscript or a transcription of it" (80).

⁴³ See, in particular, Paul Werstine, "Narratives About Printed Shakespeare Texts: 'Foul Papers' and 'Bad' Quartos," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 41 (1990): 65–86. See also Paul Werstine, "Plays in Manuscript" in Cox and Kastan, eds., 481–97; and Paul Werstine, "Post-Theory Problems in Shakespeare Editing," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 29 (1999): 103–17. Returning to the question of "foul papers" in the latter essay, Werstine addresses "the question of precisely what has counted as evidence and what has not, and the question of how data have been constituted as evidence in the formation of one prominent editorial grand narrative" ("Post-Theory Problems," 103).

⁴⁴ This date is favored by Bevington, ed., A-10; Evans, ed., 81; Wells and Taylor, *Textual Companion*, 117–18; and Andrew Gurr, ed., *King Richard II* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984), 1. For the entry in the Stationers' Register, see Arber, 3:89.

⁴⁵ On the composition dates of *1 Henry IV*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *2 Henry IV*, and *Much Ado About Nothing*, see Bevington, ed., A-4, A-10–11, A-11–12, and A-5; Evans, ed., 82–83; and Wells and Taylor, *Textual Companion*, 119–21. Here and elsewhere in this essay dates are new style. For the entries in the Stationers' Register, see Arber, 3:105, 122, and 170.

Cressida, which was entered on 7 February 1603 (though not printed until 1609), has been conjectured by Honigmann and, more recently, by David Bevington to have been written in 1601.⁴⁶ *The History of King Lear*, finally, is usually dated c. 1605–6 and was entered on 26 November 1607.⁴⁷

If presented too rigidly, my argument is in danger of circularity. The traditional dating of at least some plays is likely to be infected with exactly those assumptions about the publication of Shakespeare's plays against which I am arguing here. If scholars mistakenly believed, for instance, that the players reluctantly (if at all) released a manuscript only once a play had lost its drawing power on stage, a date of composition too close to the play's appearance in print (or in the Stationers' Register) would clearly not have recommended itself. On the other hand, the date of composition of several plays can be determined with relative precision independently of any assumptions about publication. *Richard II*, for example, is probably indebted to Samuel Daniel's *Civil Wars* (1595) and may have been performed at the house of Sir Edward Hoby on 9 December 1595.⁴⁸ The topical allusion to the Spanish vessel called the *St. Andrew* in the opening scene of *The Merchant of Venice* would very likely have been made soon after news of its capture reached England in July 1596. While other comparable examples could be given, it must be admitted that for some of the plays, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, there is nothing beyond style to suggest a particular date. Therefore much of the above is necessarily conjectural, and uncertainties of dating make any exact calculations impossible. Yet where evidence is available regarding a play, it indicates an interval of roughly two years between composition and entrance.

Whatever manuscript the lost edition (Q0) was based on, *Love's Labor's Lost*—probably written about 1594–95⁴⁹—is not likely to have markedly departed from the established pattern. It was not entered in the Stationers' Register and was first published some time before 1598, quite possibly about two years after it reached the stage. All we know about *Romeo and Juliet* is that it may well have been written c. 1595,⁵⁰ that the "bad" edition was published in 1597, and that it was followed by the "good"

⁴⁶ See E.A.J. Honigmann, "The Date and Revision of *Troilus and Cressida*" in *Textual Criticism and Literary Interpretation*, Jerome J. McGann, ed. (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1985), 38–54; David Bevington, ed., *Troilus and Cressida* (Walton-on-Thames, UK: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 11; and Arber, 3:226.

⁴⁷ Bevington, ed., *Complete Works*, A–17; Wells and Taylor, *Textual Companion*, 128; and Arber, 3:336.

⁴⁸ See E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), 2:320–21.

⁴⁹ See Evans, ed., 80–81; and Wells and Taylor, *Textual Companion*, 117. In their introduction to the play in the Oxford *Complete Works*, Wells and Taylor unaccountably disagree with themselves, this time suggesting "1593 or 1594" (315). Bevington, more conservatively, considers dates as wide apart as 1588 and 1597 (*Complete Works*, A–2–3).

⁵⁰ See Bevington, ed., *Complete Works*, A–14; Evans, ed., 81; and Wells and Taylor, *Textual Companion*, 118.

edition in 1599. Whether or not Q1 anticipated Shakespeare and his fellows' sale of the manuscript underlying Q2, the time lapse is again one of approximately two years. As for *Henry V*, if the Lord Chamberlain's Men had intended to sell a "good" manuscript some two years after the play was first performed, they may have been anticipated by whoever sold the nonauthorial manuscript that served as copy for the first, "bad" edition. Significantly, the time lapse between composition and sale to a stationer seems in this case to have been far less than two years: probably written in 1599, *Henry V* is mentioned in the Stationers' Register in August 1600 among a list of "thinges formerlye printed," suggesting that it had appeared relatively early that year.⁵¹

Something similar may have happened with *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Elizabeth Schafer and, especially, Giorgio Melchiori have now discredited Leslie Hotson's suggestion that the play was written specifically for the Garter Feast at Westminster in 1597, and Melchiori has convincingly argued that the play was written "not before late 1599 or 1600."⁵² Whoever was responsible for selling to John Busby the manuscript that was entered in the Stationers' Register on 18 January 1602 and published the same year may thus have anticipated the Lord Chamberlain's Men's attempt to sell the play some two years after it first reached the stage.

To sum up: of Shakespeare's first dozen or so plays written for the Lord Chamberlain's Men, not a single one that could legally have been printed remained unprinted by 1602. As a rule, the Lord Chamberlain's Men (if they had not been anticipated by someone else, or if legal constraints did not make printing impossible) seem to have sold Shakespeare's manuscripts to a publisher approximately two years after the plays reached the public stage.⁵³ If the composition date of c. 1595–96 is correct, then *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, not entered until 8 October 1600, is an exception, the *only* exception, among what seem to have been Shakespeare's first dozen plays written for the Lord Chamberlain's Men.⁵⁴ While

⁵¹ Arber, 3:169. For the composition date of *Henry V*, see Bevington, ed., *Complete Works*, A-12–13; Evans, ed., 83; and Wells and Taylor, *Textual Companion*, 121.

⁵² See Leslie Hotson, *Shakespeare versus Shallow* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1931), 111–22; Elizabeth Schafer, "The Date of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*," *Notes and Queries* 236, n.s. 38 (1991): 57–60; and Giorgio Melchiori, ed., *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Walton-on-Thames, UK: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 18–30, esp. 20. See also Melchiori's *Shakespeare's Garter Plays: Edward III to Merry Wives of Windsor* (Newark: U of Delaware P; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1994), 92–112.

⁵³ As Blayney has pointed out, "since the overall demand for plays was unimpressive it is likely that many of those that saw print were offered to, rather than sought out by, their publishers" (392). The stationers the Lord Chamberlain's Men seem to have approached most frequently are Andrew Wise (who entered *Much Ado About Nothing*, 1 and 2 *Henry IV*, *Richard II*, and *Richard III*) and James Roberts, the playbill printer (who entered *The Merchant of Venice*, *Hamlet*, and *Troilus and Cressida*). See Arber, 3:89, 93, 105, 122, 170, 212, and 226.

⁵⁴ If an exceptional four to five years elapsed between composition and entrance rather than approximately two, several explanations might be advanced. The supply of playbooks often having exceeded the demand, perhaps no stationer was willing to invest. It may even be significant that *A Midsummer*

scholars have hitherto argued that Shakespeare and his company were indifferent, if not opposed, to the publication of his plays, and have tried to find various explanations for all those plays that were published, I suggest that more economical reasoning can account for the publication of his plays if we assume, on the contrary, that the Lord Chamberlain's Men and their playwright actively supported publication of his plays, and that the absence rather than the presence of an early edition of a Shakespeare play requires explanation.

What can account for the approximately two-year lapse between composition and initial performance, on the one hand, and sale to and entrance by a publisher in the Stationers' Register on the other? In other words, why, if the Lord Chamberlain's Men supported rather than opposed the publication of Shakespeare's plays, did they defer sale of the manuscripts? A possible reason is that as long as a play was relatively new, the Lord Chamberlain's Men hoped to profit from a more prestigious and lucrative form of publication than print. Harold Love believes that "Shakespeare may well have put work into circulation through the agency of scribes," and that "The sale or presentation to a wealthy patron of a manuscript of a favorite play would have offered an opportunity for additional income."⁵⁵ Introducing the 1647 Beaumont and Fletcher Folio, Humphrey Moseley wrote: "Heretofore when Gentlemen desired but a Copy of any of these *Playes*, the meanest piece here (if any may be called Meane where every one is Best) cost them more then foure times the price you pay for the whole *Volume*."⁵⁶ Blayney has estimated that an unbound copy of the Shakespeare First Folio cost approximately 15s.⁵⁷ The Beaumont and Fletcher Folio, printed twenty-four years later, may have cost about the same or slightly more. Love gives further evidence suggesting that a manuscript presented by its author would have sold for about three or four guineas, two or three times as much, that is, as a stationer paid for a manuscript.⁵⁸ Moseley's "Gentlemen" may have been unlikely to order a manuscript copy of a play unless the playwright was able to boast—as Thomas Middleton does in a dedication to William Hammond on one of the extant manuscripts of *A Game at Chess*—that the play was not available in print, that no "Stationers Stall can Showe" the play.⁵⁹ Although there is no positive evidence that such a practice was at all common dur-

Night's Dream may originally have been written for a specific wedding and did not reach the public stage until later.

⁵⁵ Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 67–68.

⁵⁶ I quote from W. W. Greg, *A Bibliography of the English Printed Drama to the Restoration*, 4 vols. (London: Bibliographical Society, 1939–59), 3:1234.

⁵⁷ Peter W. M. Blayney, *The First Folio of Shakespeare* (Washington, DC: Folger Library Publications, 1991), 26.

⁵⁸ See Love, 67.

⁵⁹ Bodleian Library manuscript Malone 25.

ing Shakespeare's lifetime, it is possible that Shakespeare's company chose to postpone the publication of a play during the first two years of its existence in the hope that certain gentlemen would order and pay a handsome sum for a scribal copy.

This, however, is perhaps not the most likely explanation for the delayed publication of Shakespeare's plays. Discussing the wave of playbook publication in 1594, shortly after the playhouses reopened, Blayney has argued:

If we assume that the players thought of performance and publication as mutually exclusive alternatives, it would indeed seem likely that the closure, rather than the reopening, caused the glut. But if we decline to make that assumption, there is a perfectly plausible reason why the reopening itself might have prompted the players to flood the market with scripts. The strategy is known today as "publicity," or "advertising."⁶⁰

In other words, the companies may have viewed two of a play's forms of publication—performance and print, the stage and the page, the playhouse and the printing house—as not only compatible but synergetic. If this was so, it may explain why it was in the Lord Chamberlain's Men's interest to postpone print publication. When a play first reached the stage, it was likely to attract an important number of spectators simply because it was new. This is demonstrated by the figures in Henslowe's diary, which are consistently much higher for new than for old plays. According to the address "To the Reader" in *The Famelie of Love*, "Plaies in this Citie are like wenches new falne to the trade, onelie desired of your neatest gallants, whiles the'are fresh: when they grow stale they must be vented by Termers and Cuntrie chapmen."⁶¹ A new play, then, did not need extra publicity. On the other hand, selling a manuscript to a publisher may have been a way of securing free promotion for a revival when a playbook would have been sold in bookshops and advertised with title pages put up on posts throughout London.⁶² Considering that only a small fraction of the playwrights' output reached print, published playbooks may well have recommended plays to theatergoers.

What evidence can be adduced in support of the theory that theatrical companies in the 1590s considered print publication favorable rather than damaging to the plays' destiny on the public stage? There is the fact that the first quarto of *Romeo and Juliet*, printed in 1597, would have been on sale in 1598 when (as we know thanks to John Marston) the play was performed at the Curtain.⁶³ There is

⁶⁰ Blayney, "Playbooks," 386.

⁶¹ [Thomas Middleton?] *The Famelie of Love* (London, 1608), sig. A1^v.

⁶² See Philip Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 116.

⁶³ Entered on 8 September 1598, Marston's *The Scourge of Villanie* contains the following exchange: "what's playd to day? . . . Iuliet and Romeo" (*The Scourge of Villanie 1599*, ed. G. B. Harrison [London: John Lane; New York: E. P. Dutton, 1925], 107).

also the fact that the second edition of *Tamburlaine* (1593) would have been available in London's bookshops when the Lord Admiral's Men revived it on 30 August 1594.⁶⁴ Additionally, *Titus Andronicus*, printed in 1594, was revived by the combined Chamberlain's and Admiral's Men in June 1594.⁶⁵ *The Taming of a Shrew*, acted on 13 June 1594, had been entered in the Stationers' Register on 2 May 1594 and was printed the same year. *A Knack to Know an Honest Man*, entered in the Stationers' Register on 26 November 1595 and published in an edition dated 1596, remained in the Lord Admiral's Men's repertory between 23 October 1594 and 3 November 1596.⁶⁶ The octavo edition of *The Massacre at Paris* is undated but in all probability belongs to 1594, the year when the play was performed ten times by the Admiral's Men between 21 June and 27 September. *The Spanish Tragedy*, finally, belonged to the Lord Strange's Men's repertory when the play was first published and, going through eleven editions between 1592 and 1633, could be found both in the London bookstalls and playhouses. The above evidence suffices to make clear that the stage and the printed page did not necessarily represent two rival forms of publication.

The number of publications of Shakespearean playbooks declined after 1600. Only five plays were published from 1601 to 1616, as opposed to thirteen plays between 1594 and 1600.⁶⁷ The seven years before 1600 saw a total of twenty-four editions of Shakespearean playbooks⁶⁸—that is, more than three per year—whereas there were only nineteen editions over the next sixteen years—slightly more than one per year. *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, of which a "bad" text was published in 1602, is the only comedy that found its way into print; and though four comedies had been printed from 1598 to 1600, none was reprinted within Shakespeare's lifetime. Apart from *Richard II*, *Richard III*, and *1 Henry IV*, which had been popular with readers in the late-sixteenth century and remained so in the early-seventeenth, only *Hamlet* and *Pericles* appeared in more than one edition between the turn of the century and Shakespeare's death.

There are better explanations for the decrease in the number of Shakespearean playbook publications than the players' alleged reluctance to publish. Blayney has suggested that the market for playbooks was temporarily glutted in the early-

⁶⁴ This and the following items of information concerning performance dates are taken from R. A. Foakes and R. T. Rickert, eds., *Henslowe's Diary* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1961).

⁶⁵ This, in any case, is the majority view. Some critics, including Jonathan Bate in his 1995 Arden3 edition (69–79), argue that the play was new in 1594.

⁶⁶ See Arber, 3:54.

⁶⁷ *Love's Labor's Won* is excluded from this count, as the evidence does not make clear whether the play, if it existed, was ever printed, and, if it was, whether it was before or shortly after the turn of the century.

⁶⁸ This count includes the two editions of *Edward III*, the lost edition of *Love's Labor's Lost* (Q0), and the first edition of *1 Henry IV* (Q0), of which only a few leaves of one copy have been preserved.

seventeenth century. No fewer than twenty-seven plays had been entered in the Stationers' Register between May 1600 and October 1601. As the supply would temporarily exceed the demand, some publishers may have delayed the printing of their plays for several years.⁶⁹ In such a situation, a stationer would obviously think twice before investing in a new playbook, since few printed playbooks repaid the initial investment within the first few years. In the early-seventeenth century expectations to make a profit with a newly published playbook would have been particularly low. Of the Shakespeare plays published in 1600 or later, *Hamlet* and *Pericles* (both going through three editions within roughly ten years) would have been a commercial success, while *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *The History of King Lear*, and *Troilus and Cressida*—none of which was reprinted until the collected editions of 1619 or 1623—were not.

Another reason for Shakespearean playbooks' diminished popularity in the early years of the seventeenth century is the 1599/1600 revival at St. Paul's and Blackfriars of children's companies, which played to more sophisticated and wealthier spectators than the adult companies, spectators with the money and education to purchase and to read printed playbooks. A disproportionate number of the plays written for children's companies (by Jonson, Marston, Chapman, Dekker, and Webster, among others) found their way into print, and, consequently, the number of other printed plays, including plays by Shakespeare, dwindled. In other words, there are no good reasons for believing that the Lord Chamberlain's/King's Men's attitude toward the printing of Shakespeare's plays changed significantly after the turn of the century. On the contrary, the early publication history of Shakespearean quartos from *Richard II* in 1597 to *Troilus and Cressida* in 1609 suggests that Shakespeare and the Lord Chamberlain's/King's Men neither opposed nor were indifferent to the print publication of Shakespeare's plays; rather, they actively supported it.

III

But what about Shakespeare's own attitude toward the print publication of his plays? The assumption that Shakespeare could very well have supervised the printing of his plays had he only cared to and, *ex negativo*, that his failure to do so reveals his indifference relies, I believe, on a set of mistaken premises. As shareholder, player, and "ordinary poet" of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, writing an average of two plays a year, studying his parts or rehearsing in the morning, playing in the afternoon, going to Stratford at least once a year and probably for longer periods when playing was suspended by outbreaks of plague, Shakespeare can hardly be blamed

⁶⁹ See Blayney, "Playbooks," 385.

for not having spent his time in printing houses. It may be tempting to imagine that when printers were busy working on some of the world's finest plays, they were more than happy to deliver proofs to the Fortune or the Globe, or to Shakespeare's home in Bishopsgate, Southwark, or Cripplegate, patiently awaiting their return after the playwright had time to examine them. The reality, however, was very different. Single plays published in quarto or octavo format sold for roughly 6d. They were considered unimportant publications and comparatively little effort went into their printing. Type usually had to be distributed for reuse soon after a sheet was printed off,⁷⁰ which means that an author supervising the printing of his text would have to invest a considerable amount of time. For the 1608 quarto of *The History of King Lear*, for example, twenty-one proof-sheets would have been printed and corrected at twenty-one different stages of the printing.⁷¹ Shakespeare cannot reasonably be expected to have supervised the printing of his playbooks even if he was interested in their publication. That Shakespeare was not as indifferent to print as is often claimed has also been suggested by Katherine Duncan-Jones, who has argued that the publication of the 1609 *Shakespeare's Sonnets* was authorial. She has also reminded us of Shakespeare's anger when poems printed in *The Passionate Pilgrim* were misattributed to him.⁷²

David Scott Kastan is among those who have argued that Shakespeare "displayed . . . no obvious desire to see his plays in print at all."⁷³ Yet his argument that Shakespeare "might well have brought [his plays] to his townsman Field, as he apparently did with the narrative poems, but . . . did not" seems to stem from another misapprehension, this one concerning printing-house practices.⁷⁴ Richard Field produced approximately three hundred books, among them many theological works, educational textbooks, editions of the classics, the 1591 edition of John Harington's translation of *Orlando Furioso*, and the 1598 collection of Sidney's works (for William Ponsonby); but Field did not publish a single play written for the public playhouse. As an apprentice, he served six of the seven years with the Huguenot printer Thomas Vautrollier (1579–85), whom he later succeeded and whose widow

⁷⁰ See Gaskell, 116.

⁷¹ For the most thorough analysis of the proofreading, revising, and press-correcting of the first quarto of *King Lear*, see Peter W. M. Blayney, *The Texts of King Lear and their Origins: Volume I, Nicholas Okes and the First Quarto* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982), 188–218.

⁷² See Katherine Duncan-Jones, ed., *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Walton-on-Thames, UK: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 1–13; and Katherine Duncan-Jones, "Was the 1609 *Shakespeare's Sonnets* really unauthorized?" *The Review of English Studies* 34 (1983): 151–71. Donald W. Foster has also forcefully argued that Shakespeare himself was behind the publication of his sonnets in 1609; see his *Elegy By W. S.: A Study in Attribution* (Newark: U of Delaware P; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1989), 227–32.

⁷³ David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare After Theory* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), 77.

⁷⁴ Kastan, 77.

he married in 1590.⁷⁵ Field seems to have been of a religious conviction that made playbooks unsuitable matter for his printing house. Other printing houses would have been far more hospitable. Andrew Wise, for example—publisher of *Richard III* (1597), *Richard II* (1597), *1 Henry IV* (1598), *2 Henry IV* (with William Aspley, 1600), and *Much Ado About Nothing* (with Aspley, 1600)—and the playbill printer James Roberts—who entered *The Merchant of Venice* (1598), *Hamlet* (1602), and *Troilus and Cressida* (1603)—seem reasonable choices if Shakespeare and his company were trying to have some of their plays published.

Since the texts of *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* are remarkably clean by comparison with those of the quarto playtexts, it is often believed—indeed taken for granted—that Shakespeare supervised their printing. This is another myth we will do well to discard and, with it, the reasoning that if Shakespeare saw the poems into print, but not the plays, then surely he did not care about the publication of his plays. London printers produced work of highly variable quality; the textual quality of *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* reflects Richard Field's printing rather than William Shakespeare's proofreading. As John Roe shows, "Once [Shakespeare's] carefully prepared manuscript was in the hands of the printer he most likely entrusted the enterprise to the professional competence of others, pausing over the printed copy only long enough to make sure that all was well with the dedication page."⁷⁶

It is true, of course, that Shakespeare provided dedications for his narrative poems but for none of his plays. This, however, simply reflects the conventions of his time. In the fullest study to date of Tudor and Stuart play dedications, Virgil B. Heltzel has observed that "during the entire reign of Queen Elizabeth and for some years after, the ordinary stage play was not thought worthy of patronal favor and none was dedicated."⁷⁷ The first dramatist to dedicate a play that had been performed in front of a paying audience was Chapman, who furnished his *Charles, Duke of Byron* (printed in 1608) with a dedication to Sir Thomas Walsingham and his son.⁷⁸ The dedication

⁷⁵ See A.E.M. Kirwood, "Richard Field, Printer, 1589–1624," *The Library*, 4th ser., 12 (1931): 1–39; Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee, eds., *The Dictionary of National Biography*, 22 vols. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1921–22), 6:1,276; and R. B. McKerrow, gen. ed., *A Dictionary of Printers and Booksellers in England, Scotland and Ireland, and of Foreign Printers of English Books 1557–1640* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1910), 102.

⁷⁶ John Roe, ed., *The Poems* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992), 291. See also Foster, who points out that "Renaissance authors assisted in reading the proofs far less often than has usually been supposed in past criticism. It was the exception, rather than the rule, for a writer in Shakespeare's London to make a thorough inspection of his proofs, since this was a labor that took at least several days, and sometimes months, to complete" (228–29).

⁷⁷ Virgil B. Heltzel, "The Dedication of Tudor and Stuart Plays," *Wiener Beiträge zur Englischen Philologie* 65 (1957): 74–86, esp. 74.

⁷⁸ As Heltzel points out, "Chapman may have been encouraged in this by Jonson's dedicatory epistle dated February 11, 1607, and prefixed to *Volpone*, in which he undertakes to defend despised dramatic poetry and with boldness to place the stamp of respectability upon his play by addressing

of printed playtexts remained nearly nonexistent until the end of Shakespeare's career. While Shakespeare, unlike Jonson, did nothing to change the conventions of play publication, it does not follow that Shakespeare was indifferent to the fate of his plays in print.

In their address "To the great Variety of Readers" which prefaces the First Folio, Heminge and Condell—who must have known more about Shakespeare's attitude toward print than we ever will—say nothing to convey the impression that Shakespeare had been indifferent to his works' afterlife: "It had bene a thing, we confesse, worthie to haue bene wished, that the Author himselfe had liu'd to haue set forth, and ouerseen his owne writings." While Heminge and Condell do not positively assert that it was Shakespeare's intention to prepare the Folio edition of his plays, these friends and fellow-actors imply that he might well have "set forth, and ouerseen his owne writings" if he had lived.

IV

If we wish to discern the true attitudes toward publication of playbooks in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries—and Shakespeare's, in particular—we must follow Peter Blayney's instruction to view such publications from the angle of the London stationers, publishers, and booksellers rather than from that of the actors and dramatists only. It is primarily the failure to do so that has resulted in the distorted views of such eminent scholars as Chambers, Bentley, Bowers, and Dutton.⁷⁹ As Blayney points out, "Everything depends on the axiom that the demand for printed plays greatly exceeded the supply—which happens to be untrue."⁸⁰ The impact of this ungrounded axiom on our understanding of Shakespearean drama can hardly be overstated. As long as we go on believing that publishers desperately wanted to acquire playtexts, we will continue to think that the acting companies more often than not tried to avoid publication. Once we realize, however, that publishers in most cases had little or nothing to gain from playbooks, we will be open to the suggestion that players and playwrights in general and the Chamberlain's/King's Men and Shakespeare in particular had no serious objections to the publication of their plays and often actively supported it. While Shakespeare does not seem to have been able to have his plays published without

it to the most noble and most aequall sisters, the two universities" (82). Even earlier, Jonson appears to have provided presentation copies of his plays with (printed or autograph) dedications. There are extant copies of *Cynthia's Revels* (printed 1601) with inserted dedications to Jonson's old schoolmaster William Camden and to the countess of Bedford, and two copies of *Sejanus* (printed 1605) with inscriptions to Francis Crane and to Sir Robert Townshend; see Heltzel, 80–81.

⁷⁹ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, 3:157–200; Bentley, 264–92; Bowers, 406–16; and Dutton, *passim*.

⁸⁰ Blayney, "Playbooks," 384; see also 384–89.

the consent of his company, it does not follow that the Lord Chamberlain's/King's Men were opposed, or that Shakespeare was indifferent to such publications. Once the contrary is granted, a whole series of other questions may appear in a new light: Why did Shakespeare write plays that are far too long to be accommodated by "the two hours' traffic of our stage"? What was Shakespeare's attitude to the possibility of his plays being read? What was the relationship between performance text and the published playtext? What is the "socialized" text of a Shakespeare play?⁸¹ And what kind of text and/or performance can we imagine behind the "bad" (or "suspect" or "short") quartos? Taking the economics of the book trade seriously, then, may open up multiple questions that Shakespeare criticism and scholarship will need to investigate.

⁸¹ See Wells and Taylor, *Textual Companion*, 16.