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Shakespeare Disintegrated Authoriality, Textuality, Co-Authorship, Biography

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Abstract

The article explores one of the most assiduously researched topics in Shakespeare criticism: that of the ways in which Shakespeare's responsibility as author of the plays that traditionally bear his name has been established. Rehearsing the major contributions to this debate (from the mid-nineteenth-century idea that Shakespeare's plays were the work of a group of intellectuals, to recent tendencies in attribution studies which dismember the canon on the basis of theories of co-authorship and collaboration), it maintains that one of the most persistent tendencies in the debate has been that of *disintegration*; and that both the dismembering of the canon as a whole and the amputating of parts of it as collaboratively written have had the paradoxical effect of de-authorialising what are conventionally known as 'Shakespeare's plays'. Not simply meant as a historical survey, the article also highlights the fact that, as well as determining effects on the Shakespeare canon, disintegrative tendencies have inspired theories of the text relevant to the construction of authorial identity, and have also generated a fallout on the idea, expressed by bibliographers and textual scholars, that the composition and configuration of texts are inescapably collaborative. Finally, the article maintains that biography too has been affected by a notion of disintegration which insists on a de-personalised subject and the idea that a life, no less than a text, is a socially-composed construct.

Keywords: *Authorship, Biography, Co-Authorship, Disintegration, Shakespeare*

As if a man were author of himself
And know no other kin.
William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, 5.3.36-37

1. Introduction

The article intends to show that one of the main guiding lines in Shakespeare criticism has been the idea of *disintegration*. This is especially true when the issue discussed is that of 'authorship', an idea which began to materialise about mid-nineteenth century

in the work of those who thought that the man from Stratford was the front man of a group of noble intellectuals who actually wrote the plays. But the idea of a disintegrated Shakespeare was rife even during his lifetime in the work of authors and printers who anthologised his narrative poems and even his plays; it persisted in various, more scholarly forms throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the works of editors who fragmented the canon and the texts of single works by rejecting passages deemed of minor poetic quality, and therefore non-authorial, isolating them from what was superbly poetic and therefore 'genuine' Shakespeare; and, by the end of the nineteenth century, in the work of those scholars who tested and variously grouped and classified the metrical and linguistic features of Shakespeare's plays in order to establish their chronology. Finally, present-day disintegrationist practices make use of sophisticated tools of scholarly editing in order to distinguish the various hands that allegedly co-authored certain plays. Thus, the attempts to construct a reliable, firm and durable canon ended up by producing a multiplication and a dispersal not only of texts and parts of texts, but also of authorial images and identities.

The several stories of these Shakespeares have been told countless times, but this article rehearses them in order to illustrate the place held by the *ratio* of disintegration in the construction of Shakespearean authorship; an idea which seems to me to have prevailed more enduringly and insistently over other conceptual lines in the more than three centuries of critical endeavour. It also maintains that the various forms of disintegration that affected the Shakespeare canon have produced a fallout effect on theories of text and authorship; and that, in turn, certain theories of *disintegrated authorship* have had an impact on the examination of playwriting practices in early modern England. This temptation to dismember the canon became noticeable in the mid-nineteenth century theories of divided authorship mentioned above which, although confused and disconcerting, soon gained credit among some intellectuals; it persisted in different shapes until subsequent theories and practices of attribution represented it in a 'scientific' textual garb, and finally in a perspective which favours the idea of collaboration and co-authorship. Indeed, present-day disintegrationist critical practices, which inevitably involve a diminution of authorship, have caused some scholars to question some of the more extreme fractionalist practices and conclusions. Commenting on Gary Taylor's essay on 'The Canon and Chronology of Shakespeare's Plays', published in the 1987 *Textual Companion* to the Oxford Shakespeare Edition (Wells *et al.* 1987), John Jowett illustrates what he believes is the overall attitude of that edition: 'in the postmodern era the imperative to preserve organic unity holds little command. In our dispersed and variegated notion of the subject area in English, its primary instance, Shakespeare, is subject to energetic disintegration'. The passage ends with what amounts to a confession: 'Our Shakespeare is a disintegrated Shakespeare' (2014, 182). The 'energetic disintegration' that Jowett reads in the Oxford edition (Wells and Taylor 1986a) is today so firmly established in attribution studies as to have caused some concern. 'At present', Darren Freebury-Jones writes, 'Shakespeare attribution studies ... appear to be in a state of limbo, with the pendulum swinging too far in the direction of co-authorship and disintegration, as opposed to Shakespeare-centrism' (2019, 272).

2. *Authorship and Shakespeare Studies*

Hugh Craig notes that '“Authorship”, in relation to Shakespeare, can mean a number of things'. The word 'authorship', he recalls, was for the first time employed in the expression 'authorship question' to describe the perspective of so-called anti-Stratfordians, who argue that William Shakespeare of Stratford was not the author of the works attributed to him and that 'some other person or persons is responsible' (2012, 15). The second area, Craig says, concerns the notion of

authorship in general and the ways in which it has developed over time. The traditional vision ascribes the responsibility of authorship to an individual, while a different, more recent vision affirms that authorship is collaborative, and therefore fragmented, because it always takes place within a network of social activities which contribute to the work's composition and transmission. The third area, certainly the most intensely researched, is that of the composition of the Shakespeare canon. The attempt to establish a reliable and steady image of the canon has been performed by resorting either to the external evidence provided by documents or to the internal evidence which attributes importance, among other things, to the idea of 'style'. As to the plays, the original, historically-established canon is the one represented by the 1623 Folio edition. This has been reshaped by amendments (more or less conjectural and impressionistic, more or less objective and 'scientific') suggested in centuries of textual criticism, as well as by addition or subtraction of whole texts or of parts of texts. The questions, in this area, are: 'Which of the works sometimes attributed to Shakespeare are apocryphal? Which plays are in fact collaborations? Which sections of plays outside the canon were in fact written by Shakespeare? How many works can be attributed to Shakespeare as sole author?' (15-16). These questions are at the core of the swarming area of so called 'attribution studies'.

The collaborative aspect of the theories of authorship evoked by Craig can be further commented on because it has a crucial impact not only with reference to the configuration and transmission of texts, but also as regards the very construction of the author as Author. An Author is indeed a social, publicly acknowledged construct to whose formation many cultural elements concur. In the case of Shakespeare, this aspect should be considered in connection with contemporary printing and publishing practices, the evaluation of readers' tastes and expectations and the profit which printers and publishers expected to make from their books' sale. As Adam Hooks says, 'The book trade constructed and, over time, transformed Shakespeare's reputation, a process contingent upon the specific commercial systems in which his works existed' (2016, 4). Indeed, printers and publishers who care for business and are alert both to the readership's tastes and to their idea of excellence (and saleability) of certain authors and texts are also, to a significant extent, responsible for the construction of certain canons and of their authoriality; conversely, they are also responsible for the dissolution of these canons when the public's attention to a certain author would decline or the general horizon of expectation would change.¹

Further, an important aspect of the social construction of authoriality is entrusted to the material configuration of the books in which texts are presented to the public. In Shakespeare's time, the destiny of plays was that of being poorly and ephemerally printed: 'print', as D.F. McKenzie says, 'was not the proper medium for plays', because 'the London book trade lacked any kind of literary idealism that acknowledged the popular drama as commanding typographic respect' (2002a, 200). Until 1623, Shakespeare's plays were presented in the modest shape of unbound pamphlets, and – as Peter Stallybrass and Roger Chartier say – 'Unbound pamphlets are not the materials of immortality, whatever claims a writer may make about the immortality of verse' (2007, 41). The bound edition in a Folio format of his plays (Shakespeare, 1623), instead, represented the highest tribute his colleagues could bestow on William Shakespeare as a dramatic Author, establishing his plays' perpetual canonization.

Other authorial *personae* emerge from certain editorial, printing and reading practices. When, by the end of the sixteenth century, the name of William Shakespeare started to attract book readers, two different phenomena started to prove profitable to the market: on the one

¹ The idea of 'horizon of expectation' was elaborated by H.R. Jauss in the context of his reception theory. See, in particular, 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory', in Jauss 1982, 3-45.

hand, Shakespeare's texts (both poetical and theatrical) were being fragmented in quotes and published in commonplace books;² on the other, the fragile quartos of his works were bound, by printers and collectors, to prevent them from disassembling, in volumes which contained either other Shakespearean texts or texts by other authors. These dismembered, fragmented, disintegrated and re-assembled Shakespeares present, as we shall see, as many authorial figures as each arrangement of texts suggests, reconfiguring the works' meaning.

Other authorial Shakespeares are those emerging from scholarly editing. The attempt to establish a reliable version of Shakespeare's plays, and the almost unprecedented critical effort connected with this attempt has produced an immense field of research and reflection. How has this effort changed the configuration of the plays published in 1623 and, accordingly, the idea of their authorship? Craig produces a statement that may sound surprising: Although 'some fine intellects have given their best efforts in the quest to resolve some of the perplexing problems that arise' from Shakespeare's texts, 'It is also worth noting that after several centuries of endeavour there has really been not so very much added, nor much taken away, from the first monument of Shakespeare authorship – the Folio volume of 1623'. On the other hand, Craig notes that the questions posed by the Shakespeare text have also elicited considerations about 'the nature of authorship itself' (2012, 30). Can it be argued, then, that the scholarly efforts of the fine minds that attended to the texts' reconstruction have been – and are being – more profitable for the construction of a general theory of the Text and of Authorship than for the reconstruction of the texts of the Author William Shakespeare? Certainly, the quantity and quality of experimentation, the incessant developing and practicing of new methods of approach to texts, new definitions of the notion of text and of authorship have composed an area of reflection, both theoretical and empirical that, although inspired by the dilemmas raised by the Shakespeare canon, stands alone in the history and development of textual criticism. 'All this', Edward Pechter writes,

may not have brought us to a final revelation of Shakespeare's intention as in itself it really is, but it has produced plausible speculations along the line and, perhaps more important, added immeasurably to the intellectual sophistication of what we do and the complexity of the institutional framework in which we do it. (2011, 131)

3. *Authorship (and Authors) May Be Doubted*

Though not the first to express doubts about the authorship of Shakespeare's plays, the American Delia Bacon was the first to formulate these doubts in a strongly assertive fashion, committing her idea(s) first to a long anonymously published essay (Anonymous [Delia Bacon] 1856) and then to a most cumbersome volume (Bacon 1857);³ above all, she was the only one to have devoted her whole life to the mission of disputing the man from Stratford's authorship of Shakespeare's plays.

Bacon's point of departure were the biographical considerations which still constitute one of the bases of anti-Stratfordians' arguments: how could a 'stupid, ignorant, illiterate, third-rate play-actor' (Anonymous [Delia Bacon] 1856, 19) whom she dubs 'Will the Jester' (Bacon

² Those of commonplacing are characteristically readers' practices. Readers perform this activity either by copying fragments which they deem worthy to be remembered or annotating their texts' margins adding references, or even enacting a sort of censorship by crossing out passages, thereby expropriating, reappropriating and recontextualizing the texts' authorship.

³ The publication of another article (or other articles) in *Putnam's Monthly* was probably stopped by the American Shakespearean Richard Grant White. See Holderness 2013, 10.

1857, xx and *passim*), with no university education, have written the immortal works that have been attributed to him? How could it be possible that no manuscript testifying the literary activity of the man from Stratford has been handed down to us? How can the unequalled depth of thought which pervades the plays be ascribed to a man who never cared for anything but economic profit? How could that third-rate player have acquired knowledge of countries he never visited, of courtly environments he was never associated with; and how could he master knowledge of the law or of the classics which the plays exhibit at every step?

Bacon was never explicit about the alternative authorship she imagined, and never took the trouble of producing evidence to prove it. There were, she affirmed, at the courts of Elizabeth and James, men of superior mind, and that extraordinary corpus of plays was the work of these intellectuals, a consortium at whose centre was Francis Bacon, and to which Walter Raleigh, Edmund Spenser, Philip Sidney, Edward de Vere Earl of Oxford and many others also belonged (see Hopkins 1959, 268). The works attributed to William Shakespeare had been written by these great intellectuals and the player from Stratford was only an ignorant figurehead. Bacon also devised a strong political motivation inducing these intellectuals to hide their authorship under the name of William Shakespeare: their ideas, which she saw especially expressed in *King Lear*, *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar*, represented a radical opposition to the police regime of Elizabeth and Cecil, embodying an (all-American) idea of Republican liberty which they could not represent openly without risking a charge of high treason.

Though Bacon was considered with respect by the intellectuals to whom she exposed her theory, none of them was ever convinced by it: neither Emerson, who acted as agent for the publication of her first, anonymous article and empathetically corresponded with her for years; nor Hawthorne, who funded the publication of her bulky volume and reluctantly wrote a preface in which he distanced himself from her theses; nor Carlyle who, when she first exposed her theory to him 'began to shriek' (T. Bacon 1888, 62). Even less could James Spedding, editor of the works of Francis Bacon, who was present at the Carlyles' when Bacon visited them, adhere to her theories, in spite of the fact that, ironically, three years before meeting Bacon, he had published an essay entitled 'Who Wrote Shakspeare's *Henry VIII*?' (1850).⁴ Even so, all of these men and some women intellectuals who were acquainted with her sharp intelligence, showed admiration for Delia's perseverance and for her intellectual gifts. Indeed, after a while, the 'Authorship Question' started to infect, among others, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, Henry James, Sigmund Freud and others. The virus of this heresy had contaminated the *corpus* of the plays attributed to William Shakespeare and, as we will see, this *corpus* was never to be freed of the virus. Bacon had taken the lid off Pandora's box: as Emerson put it, she 'has opened the subject so that it can never again be closed' (Hopkins 1959, 287).

Equal respect was not shown in writings immediately after her death in 1859:⁵ then, as well as subsequently, her arguments were not discussed, but only – as noted by Graham

⁴ Spedding's article for the first time expressed doubts about Shakespeare's sole authorship of the play and argued for his collaboration with Fletcher. On Spedding's article, see Egan 2017, 29. It is also ironic that Spedding, who rejected firmly Bacon's violation of the integrity of Shakespeare's canon is ranked today among nineteenth-century disintegrators (33-34).

⁵ In an article published after her death, Hawthorne said that she was 'a monomaniac'; spoke of 'her bewilderment' and 'insanity', and wrote that in her book 'There was a great amount of rubbish' (1863, 55). However, he acknowledged that beneath 'her readily changeable moods and humors ... there ran a deep and powerful undercurrent of earnestness, which did not fail to produce in the listener's mind something like *a temporary faith* in what she herself believed so fervently' (53, my italics). It has been suggested that Hawthorne's posthumous description of Bacon may be read as his last portrait of a 'Gothic' heroine (Baym 1994).

Holderiness – dismissed ‘as simply wrong’ (2013, 10). More recent accounts have been even more disparaging, invariably evoking mental illness as the source of her alleged critical ‘deviation’;⁶ conversely, her idea of a Shakespeare decentralised and shared, however confused, has never been evaluated in connection with the disclaiming of a Shakespeare-centred vision that present attribution studies are accrediting.⁷

The most dispassionate among recent treatments is that of James Shapiro, who even suggests that Bacon’s ideas may have been influenced by the Homeric authorship controversy and by the way ‘Higher Criticism’ had affected biblical scholarship: ‘She could see in biblical and Homeric textual scholarship the extent to which questions of authorship were overturning centuries of conventional wisdom’ (2010, 88);⁸ and, discussing the appeal that Bacon’s theory had held on ‘some of the greatest literary minds of the day on both sides of the Atlantic’, he says that ‘it wasn’t just her intelligence that attracted them: they also saw the extent to which her work was in the radical tradition of the Higher Criticism, to which they were sympathetic’ (99).

The passage in Shapiro’s book that is most inspiring for my present purpose is the following:

Delia Bacon’s claim that the plays were politically radical was a century and a half ahead of its time. So too was her insistence that some of the plays should be read as collaborative. Had she limited her argument to these points ... there is little doubt that, instead of being dismissed as a crank and a madwoman, she would be hailed today as the precursor of the “New Historicists”, the first critic to assert that the plays anticipated the political upheavals England experienced in the mid-seventeenth century. (97)⁹

I agree: and would stress that, had she, while maintaining her main thesis, clarified the way(s) in which she imagined that ‘that immortal group of heroes, and statesmen, and scholars, and wits, and poets’ (Anonymous [Delia Bacon] 1856, 4) might have co-authored the plays attributed to Shakespeare, she would be hailed today as the precursor of what in the present debate is the most heated and fertile issue: that of co-authorship and collaboration.¹⁰

⁶ ‘Deviations’ is the title of Part VI of Schoenbaum’s *Shakespeare’s Lives*. Schoenbaum describes Bacon as ‘an eccentric American spinster’ (1991, 385); he talks of ‘destructive demons [which] lurked in her unconscious’ (386); her theories are ‘hysterical’ and ‘mad’ (389) and were dictated by ‘paranoia’ (393). The chapter is disseminated with expressions like ‘monomania’, ‘disordered thoughts’, ‘megalomaniac persuasion’. Also Jonathan Bate evokes lunacy, and resorts to humour when, discussing ‘the large and colourful army of Anti-Stratfordians’, he says that he began to become sceptical about de Vere’s claim when he knew that its first proponent ‘rejoiced in the name of J. Thomas Looney’ (1997, 66). But his most ungenerous choice is the title of the chapter he devotes to Bacon: ‘An excellent private asylum’ (96): an ungentle metonymy devised to transfer qualities of the madhouse where Bacon was confined to the person confined. For Gary Taylor, Delia Bacon’s mental problem ‘would now be diagnosed as neurotics, but the movement as a whole ... could never have succeeded unless it had been supported by mass paranoia’ (1991, 219).

⁷ Holderiness acknowledges that Bacon’s critique of power is ‘a constitutive element in both New Historicist and cultural materialist criticisms of Shakespeare’; and adds that ‘her theory that the plays ... were more likely written collectively and collaboratively than by a single, however gifted, person ... is today becoming an influential paradigm in Shakespeare studies’ (2013, 11).

⁸ On the same issue, Gary Taylor’s attitude is one of derision: ‘If you doubted the authority of the Bible, why should you believe in the existence of God or Jesus? If you could not trust the Bible, why should you trust the First Folio? And if you doubted the authority of the First Folio, why should you believe in the existence of that incarnate deity of poetry, the “immortal” Shakespeare?’ (1991, 213).

⁹ Another interesting feature of Bacon’s first article is her acknowledgement of the popular nature of the theatre, of ‘its permanent relations to the popular mind, and its capability for adaptation to new social exigencies’; she writes of the theatre as ‘this mighty instrument of popular sway, this mechanism for moving and moulding the multitude ...’ (Anonymous [Delia Bacon] 1856, 15).

¹⁰ Paul Edmonson and Stanley Wells note that the issue of this ‘too-long-established heresy’ (2013, xiv) has been ‘largely ignored by many Shakespeare scholars’ (xiii), and avow that ‘the authorship discussion is a complex intellectual phenomenon well worthy of objective consideration’ (xiv).

The story of the disintegration of Shakespeare has rarely been connected to the early ‘deviationist’ thought contrasting the orthodox view transmitted by the 1623 Folio. In order to bring the story back to what I believe is its early development, I will go through different versions of shared and/or dispersed authoriality mainly with reference to Shakespeare’s plays arguing that Shakespeare the Author has been shaped, transmitted and received less by a notion of organic unity than by one of disintegration and dispersion.

4. *Combined and Bound Shakespeares*

In his Introduction to *Shakespeare and the Book*, D.S. Kastan announces his project as follows: ‘I would argue ... that literature exists ... only and always in its materializations, and that these are the conditions of its meaning rather than merely the containers of it’ (2001, 4). But the material ‘textual condition’ also affects the identity of the author: ‘The universe of literature’, Jerome McGann says, ‘is socially generated and does not exist in a steady state. Authors themselves do not have, *as authors*, singular identities; an author is a plural identity and more resembles what William James liked to call the human world at large, a multiverse’ (1991, 75). Shakespeare’s ‘multiversity’ is embodied in a number of editorial forms reflecting different practices that shaped and conditioned the identity of both text and author; and it is also embodied in the ways readers have approached those different editorial suggestions; for also readings ‘are materially and socially declined’ (8).

Introducing their treatment of the ways in which and means by which Shakespeare’s reputation was created, Peter Stallybrass and Roger Chartier argue that ‘the “Shakespeare” that we now treat in the singular has been composed by multiple historical agents (theater companies, actors, publishers, composers, editors) who have produced the plural Shakespeares that continue to multiply’ (2007, 35-36). Similarly interested in investigating how ‘Shakespeare’s authorial persona was created’, Donatella Pallotti discusses the ways in which ‘Shakespeare’s poems, and those attributed to him, were appropriated, reshaped and then transmitted across a range of texts, including miscellanies, commonplace books, composite and single-authored volumes, all bound to renew time and again the experience of their reception’. Not only ‘The forms of these texts, their modalities and structures inevitably affected the reading and interpretation of the poems themselves’, but, even more crucially, ‘they raise a wider concern about the early modern construction of authorship and the related issue of the control of meaning in literary texts’ (2016, 386). What is at stake, in other words, is ‘not only the notion of single authorship but also the idea of a single original text’ (383-384). It was in part owing to such re-arrangements that Shakespeare’s texts reached the reading public.

The first manipulations and re-creations of the original format of Shakespeare’s works started to appear about 1598.¹¹ Until then, Shakespeare’s texts (both poetical and dramatic) had been published as single-authored works (although in many cases without the author’s name) in ephemeral unbound quarto pamphlets. In these years, the reputation gained by Shakespeare, which derived mainly from the publication of his narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *Lucrece* (1594), encouraged collectors, readers, printers and publishers to appropriate his texts in different formats and combinations, either to preserve them or to promote their sale. On the one hand, ‘some of his works printed in quarto format were assembled together in collections with other texts ... in an effort to preserve the fragile pamphlets by binding several of

¹¹ The date refers to the publication of Francis Meres’ *Palladis Tamia*, the book in which Shakespeare was first anthologised.

them together in a single volume' (Chartier 2017, 93);¹² on the other, 'the growing reputation of Shakespeare ... encouraged booksellers and printers to make his name visible in order to increase sales' (92). Indeed, by the end of the century,

Shakespeare's name or initials appear on collections of poetry in which he is in fact only one of several authors, as with *The Passionate Pilgrime* published by William Jaggard in 1599, which bears the words "By W. Shakespeare", even though only five of the poems are his, or on editions of theatrical works overgenerously attributed to him. (*Ibid.*)¹³

Jaggard's collection constitutes an early instance of manipulation of single-authored and self-contained works, by conceiving an entirely new original design, and therefore constructing an entirely new *text*. 'Being directly responsible for the configuration, actually the creation, of the Shakespeare text', Pallotti says, 'Jaggard is not only an important agent in the construction of meaning but is also the "(co-)author" of a book of poems "*By W. Shakespere*"' (2016, 390). Thus intertextually reassembled, dispersed/disseminated and alienated from their original 'book' and 'work', even summoned up from a privately circulated manuscript (that of the sonnets), combined and mingled with works of other authors and – in the case of the three 'poems' drawn out of *Love's Labour's Lost* – dislodged from their original genre and discursive context, the Shakespeare fragments begin a new life earning new meanings: by materially composing a Shakespeare book which did not exist before, Jaggard created a new Shakespeare *text*.

J.T. Knight discusses the 'compiling culture' of readers, collectors, printers and publishers which manifested itself 'in the production and dissemination of Renaissance literature' (2013, 1, 2). The main focus of Knight's discussion are the manipulations performed by binding, re-binding and disbinding texts. *The Passionate Pilgrim* also appears to be crucial from this point of view, for Jaggard's 'work' was itself later reconfigured in other works by readers and curators who bound it with other texts (not only by Shakespeare), in part to contrast the fleetingness of the unbound editions,¹⁴ but also, in some cases, to affirm particular reader tastes and needs, thereby revealing some kind of underlying intertextual project. Recalling D.F. McKenzie's axiom that 'forms effect meaning' (56), Knight argues that early modern and later compilations and text-combinations are 'almost never discussed as an aspect of meaning-making by literary critics' (70). He then examines a few specimens of bound volumes containing Shakespearean works and, among others, what can be considered two, so to speak, 'accreted' versions of *The Passionate Pilgrim*, which went through a 'textual (re)assembly across multiple institutions and early collectors' in volumes in which they appeared bound with other texts. In these kinds of manipulations, Knight argues, 'the parameters of reading and interpretation are frequently established and sometimes imposed by the collectors, compilers, conservators, and curators who in a very literal sense *make books*' (55).

¹² Chartier recalls, for instance, that 'In 1609 ... the library of Sir John Harrington contained 11 volumes incorporating a total of 135 plays' and that 'The 17 Shakespearean plays in his possession were dispersed among 8 of the 11 volumes' (2017, 93).

¹³ The book contains twenty poems, of which only five are certainly by Shakespeare (versions of sonnets 138 and 144, plus three poems drawn out of *Love's Labour's Lost*), together with poems by contemporary poets including Marlowe, Raleigh and Richard Barnfield. On the configuration of *The Passionate Pilgrim*, see Taylor and Loughnane 2017, 426-427.

¹⁴ Lukas Erne maintains that, in spite of their material fleetingness, Shakespeare quarto editions 'were considered more than ephemera', as is witnessed, in his opinion, by the fact that several copies now housed in various libraries 'feature the owner's name' (2013a, 215).

In two of the compilations Knight examines (Folger STC 22341.8 and Huntington 59000-59002), *The Passionate Pilgrim* appears side by side other Shakespearean and non-Shakespearean works. Knight's analysis of these two compilations shows that the different assemblies of texts activate different readings of certain aspects of Shakespeare's narrative poems. The impact of the combination seems to be particularly strong, in the first volume, with reference to the character of Lucrece that emerges from the blend with the other texts with a strongly stressed role as agent; while, in the second, the story of Venus and Adonis, combined with Marlowe's translation of Ovid's *Amores* and Davies' satirical and misogynist verse, loses 'some of the familiar pathos and sexual energy ... finding new emphasis in its perhaps equally manifest misogynist and quasipornographic side' (75).

5. Quoted Shakespeares

A different, and even more disintegrating gesture was the publication of fragments, from both dramatic and poetic Shakespearean texts, in the so-called 'commonplace books' which gathered sententious passages by various authors deemed worthy to be remembered and re-used. The disintegrated and disseminated Shakespeare of the commonplace books composed yet another authorial figure: on the one hand, the fragmented texts were meant as an assistance to readers' memory, while, on the other, each fragment appeared as a contribution, among others, to the construction of a general canon of English poetry. The Author Shakespeare constructed by commonplacing, Peter Stallybrass and Roger Chartier say, 'bears little relation to Shakespeare's modern canonical identity as playwright and poet. If the Shakespeare of the commonplace books is "not of an age but for all time", it is because it can be transformed into reusable fragments' (2007, 51). Generally speaking, commonplace books 'give us an extraordinary insight into how poems, plays and "works" were read in early modern England. They were read above all for reuse in the form of fragments' (52).¹⁵ The author of each fragment, thus, becomes one of the contributors to a collaborative text, while the authors' names tend to disappear.

The structure of Francis Meres' *Palladis Tamia*, a collection of sayings and quoted passages published in 1598, is eloquent in this sense. The anthologised authors are listed alphabetically at the opening of the book, and texts are arranged according to themes but not introduced by the names of authors. In most cases, quotations are followed by the reference to the author in parenthesis. Shakespeare's name appears several times in the section entitled 'A comparative discourse of our English Poets, with the Greeke, Latine, and Italian Poets' (1598, 279-287), but not in the list of authors; in fact, no passage from Shakespeare is quoted.

Commonplacing responded to readers' needs and habits, as marking and/or copying for rereading and using was 'a practice taught in humanist education that had first been applied to classical and Christian authorities and was increasingly applied to vernacular literature as well' (Erne 2013a, 228). According to Stallybrass and Chartier, the most important commonplac-

¹⁵D.F. McKenzie quotes a passage in which John Locke 'explicitly addresses ... the role of typographic form in obscuring or revealing [intention]'. McKenzie reports Locke's passage when he says that 'The dividing of [St Paul's epistles] into Chapters and Verses ... whereby they are so chop'd and minc'd, and as they are now Printed, stand so broken and divided, that not only the Common People take the Verses usually for distinct Aphorisms, but even Men of more advanc'd Knowledge in reading them, lose very much of the strength and force of the Coherence, and the Light that depends on it'; also the bible suffers, according to Locke, a similar diminution by its traditional graphic representation, for 'loose sentences, and Scripture crumbled into Verses ... quickly turn into independent Aphorisms' (2004, 56). Lock's text is *An Essay for the Understanding of St Paul's Epistles. By Consulting St Paul himself*.

ing project was that of John Bodenham's *Bel-vedère, or, The Garden of the Muses*, published in 1600.¹⁶ The book's idea of authoriality can be described as residual: 'Although the "authorities" are listed at the beginning of *Bel-vedère*, the radical fragmentation of the sentences, together with their anonymity, worked against authorship as a relevant category' (2007, 48). The book's editing is to be attributed to Anthony Munday, who organized fragments (only decasyllabic lines, printed sequentially, with the sole interruption of the change of topic) probably selected by John Bodenham. In his introductory sonnet, Munday praises Bodenham as 'his louing and approoued friend' and as 'author' of the collection (sig. b), abasing himself to the role of copier or scribe. One may imagine that Munday took the fragments from the margins of Bodenham's books, marked by Bodenham while he was reading.¹⁷ But Bodenham may have himself derived suggestions from certain 'commonplace markers' for which printers seem to have been responsible. Stallybrass and Chartier note that, in Field's 1594 edition, *Lucrece* was typographically pre-arranged for fragmentation, and that many of the fragments Bodenham/Munday chose for *Belvedère* are those originally marked in Field's edition.¹⁸ They rightly remark that, 'By printing *Lucrece* with commonplace markers in 1594, Richard Field produced a book that drew attention to the fact that it had already been read as a canonical text' (2007, 47),¹⁹ and had accordingly been marked for reuse in the different form and genre of the commonplace book.

6. *Meaning by the Book*

In one of his essays, Roger Chartier quotes a passage in which Lord Chesterfield characterizes the content and function of books according to their size and material aspect: 'Solid folios are the people of business with whom I converse in the morning. Quartos are the easier mixed company with whom I sit after dinner; and I pass my evenings in the light, and often frivolous chitchat of small octavos and duodecimos' (1989a, 167). Chesterfield's classification is interesting in that it reflects the experience of a real reader. Folios are 'solid' not only because bound and therefore preserved from decay, but also because the genres of texts printed in that format ask for consideration and attention; the 'mixed company' of quartos provide a lighter reading experience, one which includes plays – if Chesterfield enjoyed reading that kind of text; while the octavos and duodecimos are mainly for the sheer pleasure produced by poetry. Elsewhere, Chartier comments on the hierarchical status of books on the basis of a principle which joins size and matter:

It was during the last centuries of the hand-copied book that a lasting hierarchy was established between the great folio volume, the shelf-book of the universities and of serious study ... the humanist book, more

¹⁶ For an account of other contemporary commonplace books in which Shakespeare passages are quoted, see Erne 2013a, 228-231. For a description of the structure of *Bel-vedère*, see Stallybrass and Chartier 2007, 45-46.

¹⁷ For the activity of readers as annotators and text-manipulators, see Mayer 2016a. In this article, Mayer examines readers' practices of appropriation of Shakespeare's poetical texts in two copies of Benson's edition of the *Poems* (1640), arranging them into various categories according to the type of intervention: 'retitling, censorship, simplifications/clarifications/transformations, as well as extraction and the implicit recontextualisation that goes with the practice' (2016a, 410). See also Mayer 2016b and 2018.

¹⁸ In Field's 1594 *Lucrece* there are lines marked by inverted commas; some, like 'A little harme done to a great good end' (sig. E1v), or 'A woefull hostesse brookes not merrie guests' (sig. H3v) have the character of maxims, others seem more randomly chosen.

¹⁹ The idea that Shakespeare's texts were apt to be anthologised persisted long after the publication of Meres' or Bodenham's books. Samuel Johnson said that Shakespeare's plays are filled with 'practical axioms and domestic wisdom'; that 'from his works may be collected a system of civil and œconomical prudence' (1765, ix). On eighteenth-century commonplacing, see de Grazia 1991b.

manageable in its mid-sized format, which served for classical texts and new works of literature, and the portable book, the pocket book or the bedside book of many uses, religious and secular, and of a wider and less selective readership. (1989b, 2)²⁰

It is again Chartier who insists on the idea that ‘Readers ... never confront abstract, idealized texts detached from any materiality’, and that ‘there is no text outside the material structure in which it is given to be read or heard’ (1992, 50, 53). Play texts, which were considered ephemeral commercial commodities, were published in the short-lived unbound quarto format; in these texts, equally inessential was the name of the author, in some cases altogether absent and in others wrongly imposed by misattribution. As Lukas Erne reminds us, between 1595 and 1622, seven different plays were misattributed to Shakespeare, or hinted at Shakespeare’s authorship by means of his initials. Erne adds that ‘no other dramatist had any playbooks misattributed to him in the same period’ (2013a, 56).

It is generally agreed that the attitude of authors was one of detachment as regarded the publication of their texts.²¹ Such insouciance was certainly not shared by Ben Jonson, by far the most self-conscious of Shakespeare’s contemporaries as regarded the literary merits of his plays and poems and about present reputation and future fame. In 1616, he personally edited his plays and poems to date and printed them in a folio format, knowing that a Folio edition was necessary for the translation of ephemeral play scripts into the high literary domain. As Hans Gabler puts it, he knew that a folio edition manifested ‘the book’s “self-awareness” to be considered’; therefore, by attending to the publication of his plays and poems, Jonson ‘underscored his role as a public personality’ (2008, 7). If Jonson’s Folio proclaimed his author as a public personality, ‘The Shakespeare folio’, D.S. Kastan says, ‘was the first to insist that a man might be an “author” on the basis of his plays alone, and, more remarkably, on the basis of plays written exclusively for the professional stage’ (2001, 63-64). Kastan also observes that ‘if Shakespeare cannot with any precision be called the creator of the book that bears his name, that book might be said to be the creator of Shakespeare’ (78). The ‘self-awareness to be considered’ of the Shakespeare Folio is first and foremost manifested in its physical aspect as an artefact. The most remarkable early modern English book was a superlative text to be read as well as an expensive specimen of bibliographical excellence to be treasured, for its editors and printers took extreme care to make it both an unprecedented tribute to a playwright and an impressive achievement of craftsmanship. As William Prynne commented on the 1632 second Folio, ‘Shackspeers Plaies are printed in the best Crowne paper, far better than most Bibles’ (1633, sig. 6v).²²

7. *Emended and Patched Shakespeares*

The critical editions produced during the eighteenth century and many of those produced in the nineteenth century called seriously into question the reliability of F1, which was generally

²⁰ On the meaning of the physical format of folio books, and of Shakespeare’s Folio in particular, see also Kastan 2001, 50-78.

²¹ Against this opinion, Lukas Erne constructs the image of a Shakespeare acutely conscious of the significance of his plays as literary compositions, and as an author aware of the importance of seeing his works in print. The issue is developed mainly in Erne 2013b. Much the same idea was expressed by W.W. Greg: ‘It is foolish to suppose that Shakespeare was indifferent to the fate of his own works’ (1955, 2).

²² Quoting Prynne’s annotation, Kastan says that ‘things as vulgarly material as typeface, format, layout, design, even paper ... are part of the text’s structures of signification’ (2001, 5).

considered the site par excellence of textual corruption. Consequently, a strong scepticism about the presence of Shakespeare's hand in many scenes or fragments of certain plays, and in certain plays as a whole, inspired mistrust in the integrity of the canon F1 established.²³

Pope's 1725 edition was the most influential in shaping this opinion. Pope believed that F1 had been irreparably polluted not only by 'the ignorance of the Players' (1725, xiv) and printers, but also by the fact that the texts delivered for printing were taken from 'two or more editions by different printers, each of which has whole heaps of trash different from the other' (xvi). For Pope, however, not only the formal elements of Shakespeare's texts had been mangled by 'the many blunders and illiteracies of the first Publishers' (xiv); the poetic quality of the texts had also suffered from the printers', editors' and players' arbitrary interventions which modified the texts of the first editions by adding 'trifling and bombast passages' (xvi) and, generally speaking, passages which 'had been added ... by the actors, or had stolen from their mouths into the written parts' (*ibid.*). Pope, therefore, felt authorized to relegate certain 'suspected passages which are excessively bad ... to the bottom of the page' (xxii). This position, which for decades prevailed in editors' speculations, was substantiated, as Gabriel Egan says, 'using little more than personal poetical taste' (2017, 28), and therefore on the basis of the aesthetic judgement of each editor, who felt thereby authorized to introduce 'improvements' by modifying the text. Certain lines, considered poor on the basis of a personal standard of poetic merit, were emended, and passages thought to be interpolated were ostracized: either suppressed, or 'degraded to the bottom of the page' (Pope 1725, xxii).²⁴ Other hands had surreptitiously insinuated themselves in the texts corrupting their integrity; paradoxically, however, the editorial gestures meant to recover the texts' integrity ended by introducing further violations and disintegration. For eighteenth-century editors, King says, 'The criterion for canonical inclusion is clearly not the *authenticity* of a work, but whether that work adds to its author's *reputation*' (2012, 87).

Of a mind similar to Pope's was Samuel Johnson. Once in the hands of the company that bought them, Johnson says, the texts

were immediately copied for the actors, and multiplied by transcript after transcript, vitiated by the blunders of the penman, or changed by the affectation of the player; perhaps enlarged to introduce a jest, or mutilated to shorten the representation; and printed at last without the concurrence of the authour, without the consent of the proprietor, from compilations made by chance or by stealth out of the separate parts written for the theatre: and thus thrust into the world surreptitiously and hastily, they suffered another deprivation from the ignorance and negligence of the printers ... no other editions were made from fragments so minutely broken, and so fortuitously reunited. (1756, 3-4)²⁵

The pessimism of Pope, Johnson and other eighteenth-century editors is duplicated and almost verbatim repeated by recent critics. In a book published in 2009 and hailed as innovative,

²³ Part of this mistrust derived from a class prejudice. For Steevens and Pope, E.G.C. King says, 'the class origins of the Folio's editors and the low social status of the Elizabethan acting profession effectively disqualified them from being reliable witnesses to Shakespeare's text' (2016, 125). A similar class prejudice seems to inspire the anti-Stratfordians' identification of aristocratic candidates as authors of Shakespeare's plays.

²⁴ Malone censured the corruptions of the Second Folio's and of later editors, Pope's in particular: 'there is scarce a page of the book which is not disfigured by the capricious alterations introduced by the person to whom the care of that impression was entrusted. This person ... and Mr. Pope, were the two great corrupters of our poet's text' (1790, xix).

²⁵ King rightly argues that, respecting fragmentation and co-authorship, *tout se tient*, by associating the 'multi-vocality' evoked by eighteenth-century Shakespeare editors with D.F. McKenzie's words on 'collaborative creations' as 'the product of social acts involving the complex interventions of human agency acting on material forms' (King 2010, 16; McKenzie 2002d, 262).

Tiffany Stern argues that what arrived at the playhouse was fragments of texts, each with its pre-playhouse history, and comments on what she terms ‘play-patching’, that is, the construction of the ‘book’ for the stage by assembling fragments and snippets:

the play in whatever form it reached the playhouse was either already a collection of scattered papers, or quickly became one ... Together, the fragments that the playhouse made, in conjunction with the fragments that play-writing had produced, and the additional fragments brought about for advertising and explaining the play, were the documents that amounted to “the play” in its first performance. (2009, 3)

Bits of text, she argues, reached the playhouse from different sources, and therefore with different authorial statuses: the ‘plots’ which constituted the texts’ backbone, the ‘playbills’ which advertised the play and synthesized its action, and also prologues, epilogues, choruses, songs, plays within the plays, etc.²⁶ Not differently, as noted by King, for eighteenth-century editors, Shakespeare’s texts had a ‘modular nature’ (2010, 3); for them, too, ‘prologues, epilogues, songs and comic dialogue occupied especially ambiguous places in the Shakespearean corpus’ (10), for they were deemed ‘more ephemeral and less likely to be Shakespeare’s’ (*ibid.*).

King highlights a correspondence of views between eighteenth-century textual critics and recent critical reflection also concerning the issue of multiple authorship: ‘To an extent ... the views of Johnson and his contemporaries foreshadow a recent trend in theatre history that emphasizes the distributed nature of authorial agency on the early modern stage’ (3). Eighteenth-century editors, however, did not elaborate ideas of co-authorship and collaboration in text-construction; the uneven journey which carried texts from writer to playhouse (and beyond) and produced their corruption was for them the effect of disorder and incompetence, not the outcome of a social activity engaging, by its very nature, a multiplicity of agents.

If, for eighteenth-century editors, the texts were infected, the infected parts must be eliminated; conversely, if what remained after disinfection was pure, resplendent Shakespeare, these beauties must be marked out and isolated for readers’ attention. It was indeed on these principles that Pope performed his many forms of disintegration. Taking an attitude similar to that of commonplacers, he isolated what he called ‘the most shining passages’ (1725, xxiii) which, he says, ‘are distinguish’d by comma’s in the margin; and where the beauty lay not in particulars but in the whole, a star is prefix’d to the scene’ (*ibid.*); conversely, passages judged un-Shakespearean because ‘excessively bad ... are degraded to the bottom of the page’ (xxii). Editors had not abandoned the idea of reconstructing the ‘author’s last intentions’; on the contrary, this was their principal aim, a task they accomplished by freeing the texts of all infecting hands. But the texts that emerged from Pope’s edition and the editions of those who shared its principles and methods were irremediably fragmented and de-authorialized. The idea that the Folio texts were chaotically assembled from diverse sources, together with an almost exclusively aesthetic orientation in the emendations suggested, produced texts whose authoriality was far from representing the alleged author’s last intentions: indeed, it produced texts in which the author had almost been elided and substituted by the contaminating hands of editors (see King 2016, 125). As Adam Hooks put it, ‘While Shakespeare’s book has been venerated, his text has not’ (2014, 292).

²⁶ Stern does not capitalise from this interesting and curious identity of views which builds a bridge between conceptually different and temporarily distant notions of text and author; neither does she capitalise from the salient and influential theories of J.F. McKenzie, Jerome McGann and Roger Chartier, published since the 1960s, which would have given theoretical substance to her idea of textual instability and collaborative agency. I will discuss these theories below in section 9. On the issue of ‘plots’ and their function, see Pugliatti 2012.

Edmond Malone is rightly considered an innovator. His 1790 edition, Margreta de Grazia says, was the first to emphasize the principle of authenticity in treating Shakespeare's works ... the first to contain a dissertation on the linguistic and poetic particulars of Shakespeare's period; the first to depend on facts in constructing Shakespeare's biography; the first to include a full chronology for the plays; and the first to publish, annotate, and canonize the 1609 Sonnets. (1991a, 2)²⁷

Malone explicitly contrasted 'the era of conjectural criticism and capricious innovation' (1790, lv), the practice of previous editors who cherished emendations based on aesthetic evaluations and personal taste; he also reappraised the authority of F1, which became the basis of his editing whenever earlier quarto editions of the plays did not exist. Contrasting Johnson's pessimism, he said that

It is not true that the plays of this authour were more incorrectly printed than those of his contemporaries ... It is not true that the art of printing was in no other age in so unskilful hands. Nor is it true ... that "these plays were printed from compilations made by chance or by stealth out of the separate parts written for the theatre". (x)

But the main target of his criticism was Pope, the great corruptor of whose 'liberties' with Shakespeare's text, the readers, Malone says, were 'disgusted' (lxvi).

Eighteenth-century editors had performed both text disintegrations of the kind effected by Pope and, by suggesting attributions and de-attributions of plays, a canon disintegration and reassessment. But Malone's passion for authenticity, which we now consider a turning point in the history of Shakespeare textual studies, was not as influential as one might think: indeed, it did not dissolve the pessimism that was at the basis of previous editors' work. As E.G.C. King maintains, 'an essentially Popean view of style and authorship continued to be in scholarly circles, even at the very end of the eighteenth century' (2010, 11).

As Margreta de Grazia points out, 'the text received by the nineteenth century ... was monumentalized in the Cambridge edition of 1863-6, whose long and imperious sway, extended by its popular single-volume deputy, the 1864 Globe edition, passed in 1921 to the New Cambridge, from which current standard editions descend' (1991a, 14).

8. *Shakespeares by Counting Methods*

In the second half of the nineteenth century, a search for contamination in Shakespeare's plays was developed in a different, more 'scientific' guise. For the first time, a disintegrationist movement aims at being considered rigorous and exact; for the first time it makes use of metrical 'tests', meticulous statistic deductions deriving from manually searched data, organized in metrical tables. The scholars responsible for this approach claimed to have discovered a scientific method for attribution similar to that experimented in the natural sciences. One of them said that

The great need for any critic who attempts to use these tests is to have had a thorough training in the Natural Sciences, especially in Mineralogy, classificatory Botany, and above all, in Chemical Analysis. The methods of all these sciences are applicable to this kind of criticism, which, indeed, can scarcely be understood without them. (Fleay 1876, 108)

²⁷ D.N. Smith said that Malone united great learning with 'a passion for the truth. We can always trust *him*. He never covers up his traces. When he is wrong he enables us to prove him wrong' (1928, 56).

Key protagonists of this approach were F.J. Fleay (1832-1909) and, later, J.M. Robertson (1856-1933), members of the New Shakspeare Society, founded in 1873 by F.J. Furnivall.²⁸ The short life of the Society, which was disbanded in 1894, was characterised by conflicts of opinion about research methods and principles among its members. The aim of the Society was to study the metrical and linguistic peculiarities of Shakespeare's texts; as one of the protagonists of this critical season said, the metrical tabulations served two ends: they are 'valuable for determining the chronological order of [Shakespeare's] production ... But the far more important end from my point of view will be the determination of the genuineness of the works traditionally assigned to a writer' (Fleay 1876, 126). As Gabriel Egan says,

The point was to ascertain the order in which the plays were written ... but looking closely at Shakespeare's versification and phrasing meant counting certain features. Comparisons with other writers' counts were inevitable. The New Shakspeare Society did not set out to alter the attribution of plays amongst Shakespeare and his contemporaries, but its philologically influenced focus on countable features ... necessarily led that way. (2017, 30)²⁹

It is with reference to these scholars and their methods of attribution that the denigratory terms 'disintegrator' and 'disintegration' were first used.

Even though the professed intent of these disintegrationists was the reverential project to determine the plays' chronology, their statistical and counting methods were rejected by many Victorian intellectuals as an outrage to poetry.³⁰ Fleay, and especially the younger Robertson, met with the unlucky chance of working 'scientifically' on Shakespeare's plays in a moment in which, after two centuries of intense and almost unchallenged canonical scepticism, credence in the F1 canon had been re-established and the guiding principle had become that of integrity. Hugh Grady says that Robertson, who continued writing well into the twentieth century, 'became a lonely and isolated voice in a period of Shakespeare scholarship when organic unity and authorial agency were the very unexamined enabling propositions for the vast majority of Shakespeareans' (1991, 112).

In 1924, the annual lecture at the British Academy was delivered by E.K. Chambers. Chambers entitled his text 'The Disintegration of Shakespeare'. In the incipit, Chambers mentions the heirs of Delia Bacon whom he defines 'small minds' and who, he says, are intent to search 'the *Dictionary of National Biography* for an alternative author, preferably aristocratic, of the plays' (1933, 23). He then goes on to consider recent 'disintegrationists', mainly Fleay and Robertson, extending his criticism to the work of John Dover Wilson who, in these years, had started to edit the Cambridge edition of Shakespeare's plays.³¹ In Chambers' text, proba-

²⁸ Furnivall used the archaic form 'Shakspeare' to distinguish the new Society from the 'Shakespeare Society' (1840-1853) founded by John Payne Collier.

²⁹ That authorship and chronology may be seen as different outputs of the same enquiry is also acknowledged by Taylor and Loughnane (2017).

³⁰ A.C. Swinburne, who was a member of the Society, penned a bitter satire of the method Fleay exposed in an intervention on *Othello* addressed to the Society. After arguing for the play's co-authorship with Rowley, Wilkins and Daborne, Swinburne says, the orator proceeded to argue that 'It was evident that the story of Othello and Desdemona was originally quite distinct from that part of the play in which Iago was a leading figure. This [the orator] was prepared to show at some length by means of a weak-ending test, the light-ending test, the double-ending test, the triple-ending test, the heavy-monosyllabic-eleventh-syllable-of-the-double-ending test, the run-on line test, and the central-pause test. Of the partnership of other poets in the play he was able to adduce simpler but not less cogent proof' (1880, 286).

³¹ When Chambers delivered his speech, seven volumes of the Cambridge edition had appeared, the series starting with the publication of *The Tempest*, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. John Jowett says that

bly for the first time, we find heretical and orthodox disintegrationists (the last being deemed scarcely less perturbing than the first) associated by what for Chambers is a devastating fury against the unity of the canon. The last paragraph of Chambers' lecture is a *de profundis* of the disintegrationist movement:

We ought to be very grateful to Mr. Robertson and Mr. Dover Wilson. We had come to think that all the critical questions about Shakespeare were disposed of; the biographical facts and even a little more than the facts chronicled, the canon and the apocrypha fixed, the chronological order determined, the text established; that there was not much left to be done with Shakespeare, except perhaps to read him. They have shown us that it is not so; and we must now go over the ground again, and turn our notional assents, with whatever modifications may prove justified, into real assents. We have all the spring joy of re-digging a well-tilled garden. (147-148)³²

Chambers' argument was clearly ironic: none of the vital critical questions about Shakespeare could be disposed of as settled, but Shakespeare's 'well tilled garden' could certainly not be left to the care of a group of gardeners that would devastate it.³³ Thus, the word 'disintegration' entered the critical parlance of Shakespeareans with definitely negative connotations; and Chambers' 'integrationist' perspective continued to hold the scene, and had the effect, as John Jowett says, of leaving attribution studies 'deep in the shadow for over half a century' (2014, 181).³⁴ And yet, in other fields, the time was ripe for experimenting and speculating on such concepts as fragmentation and decentralization:

Although not usually attracting this label, the concept of disintegration was in the literary and cultural air. 1924 fell only two years after the modernist *annus mirabilis*, the year in which T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" and James Joyce's *Ulysses* were first published. As the high modernists cemented together the fragments of the cultural tradition into new distorted structures, the futurists and surrealists of continental Europe were at the height of their productions of other, more radical, more disintegrated modes of expression. (173)

Side-by-side with the Twenties' spirit of literary revolution, we encounter, in the same years, a 'conservative' optimistic school of Shakespeare studies which manifested, in the name of 'New Bibliography', the need to distance itself both from the recent disintegrationist methods and from the impressionistic textual criticism of the pessimistic era. One of the aims of the New Bibliography school was to rescue F1 from the discredit in which it had been held during

'In Wilson's accounts of the text, textual stability and integrity were mere illusions offered by the presentation of the early printed quartos and Folio. The underlying manuscripts as he envisaged them looked very different'; John Jowett concludes saying that 'The Press had imported the spirit of disintegration into the very heart of literary culture' (2014, 180).

³² In a book published a year before Chambers delivered his speech on the disintegrators, J.M. Robertson wrote: 'Cheerfully do I recognise that all attempts to disintegrate a long-received Canon, or even to carry further a disintegration already begun, are fitly to be met by severe scrutiny. I ask only that the scrutiny shall be truly critical and not prejudiced' (1922, xvi). Evidently, the idea of disintegration had been circulating before Chambers imposed the seal of his authority on it.

³³ Gabriel Egan says that Chambers especially criticized Robertson's extreme theories 'for lacking evidential bases', but that he 'was sufficiently in sympathy with the disintegrators' aims that he printed the metrical tables of Hickson, Spedding, and Fleay as appendixes to his magisterial *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems* shortly after giving his talk; and adds that 'Chambers was by no means simply a textual conservative opposed to alterations of the Shakespeare canon by specialist analyses' (2017, 33-34).

³⁴ Demonization of disintegrationist gestures continued well into the twentieth century. In a 1988 essay on the issue of memorial reconstruction, Steven Urkowitz praises Peter Alexander 'for putting to rest the noxious voices who parcelled out bits and pieces of [the *Henry VI* plays and *Richard III*]' (1988, 232).

the almost two preceding centuries; the other was to give more solid and discerning bases to Shakespeare textual criticism. W.W. Greg described himself and the other new bibliographers as 'radical conservatives', and said that 'Perhaps never has so conservative a spirit led so revolutionary a crusade' (1942, 18).

The deep impact that the theories of the New Bibliography school had on the textual criticism of the following decades precluded from the study of Shakespeare's plays all possible ideas of co-authorship. E.G.C. King comments on this aspect of the new school saying that 'In the aftermath of the First World War ... this emphasis on authorial fragmentation came to seem distasteful and outmoded ... "disintegration" became "a dirty word" ' (2016, 130). Indeed, Chambers' authoritative *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems* (1930), stabilized the canon only admitting Fletcher's hand in *Henry VIII* and Shakespeare's hand in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, *Edward III* and *Pericles* (Jowett 2014, 181). It seemed that other instances of collaboration and other forms of disintegration could no longer be imagined; with one disconcerting exception, however.

The manuscript of *The Book of Sir Thomas More*, a text whose date of composition is uncertain,³⁵ is held in the British Library. As is well known, in the manuscript (a basic text accompanied by additions) five different hands have been discerned, that W.W. Greg designated as A, B, C, D, E plus a sixth (T), identified as that of Edmund Tilney, Master of the Revels from 1569 to 1610 and a seventh (S), identified as a scribal hand (1961, vii-x). Mainly on the basis of palaeographical evidence and by comparison with Shakespeare's six signatures, in an addition of three sheets, his hand (hand D) has been identified. The manuscript, therefore, not only appeared to constitute the only holograph witness we possess of Shakespeare's handwriting; but also an obvious proof of collaborative writing. It is rather surprising, therefore, that, in 1923, the most illustrious members of a school which was firmly convinced of the integrity and authoriality of the canon celebrated the third centenary of the publication of F1 with a book which attested the fact that, at least in one instance, Shakespeare wrote in collaboration with other playwrights. As Margreta de Grazia and Peter Stallybrass say, for the New Bibliographers the book represented 'something of an embarrassment, for the only putative record of Shakespeare's playwriting bore witness not to his authorship but to his collaboration' (1993, 277).

But the formidable group of scholars who authored the volume on *Sir Thomas More* did not consider the issue of collaboration as a perspective from which to view the play. Indeed, in the volume there appears, edited by W.W. Greg, a transcript of the 'Ill May Day Scenes' which contain the three sheets thought to be in Shakespeare's handwriting (Pollard *et al.* 1923, 193-225). Evidently, the authors' only concern was to isolate and recover *what Shakespeare had really written*, considering only by contrast (of handwriting, spelling, and content) what had been written by others, let alone the way in which this co-authored text had taken form. Rather than for representing an instance of collaborative writing, the text of *Sir Thomas More* was for them valuable because it contained a fragment of the Shakespeare canon of which Shakespeare's sole authorship could be proven; a fragment that could be isolated and extrapolated for distinct analysis. As Greg affirmed in his critical edition of the play, D's passages 'have individual qualities which mark them off sharply from the rest of the play' (1961, xiii).

The volume, nevertheless, is one of the most important scholarly contributions of the New Bibliography era, an era which Egan synthesizes as follows:

³⁵ In past decades, the date attributed to the basic text and its additions was 1592-93. Gary Taylor and Gabriel Egan, though saying that 'The date of the original play remains debated', give a range of 1590-1600 for the original play and the best guess for the Additions 1604 (2017, 551, 548).

The early New Bibliography ... blew away most of the uncertainty that preceded it, and the mature New Bibliography blew away the remaining uncertainty of the early phase ... The next significant developments concerned the mechanical processes of printing itself, which left evidence in early books that the Pollard-Greg-McKerrow school had not discovered how to read. With the development of the skills needed to read this evidence, New Bibliography ceased to be an exclusive British school and became primarily an American one. (2010, 37)

9. Enter Collaboration and Co-Authorship

G.E. Bentley's *The Profession of Dramatist in Shakespeare's Time* was published in 1971. Bentley was probably the first to devote distinct and extensive attention to the issue of collaboration. 'Every performance in the commercial theatres from 1590 to 1642', he says, 'was itself essentially a collaboration: it was the joint accomplishment of dramatists, actors, musicians, costumers, prompters (who made alterations in the original manuscript) and – at least in the later theatres – of managers' (198). Indeed, from the Henslowe papers and the whole of the Dulwich College documents,³⁶ collaboration also appears to have been a fact in playwriting: 'In the case of the 282 plays mentioned in Henslowe's diary ... nearly two-thirds are the work of more than one man' (199). But if collaboration is extensively witnessed by the extant documents, 'Methods of cooperation are much more difficult to discover than the mere fact of joint authorship' (227). Bentley was right: it was the *how* of co-authorship (as well as the *what*) that was waiting to be inquired and disclosed; and indeed yet another wave of disintegrationist cogitations in the name of collaboration and co-authorship soon started to manifest itself.³⁷ As Hugh Grady puts it,

Since about 1980 in Shakespeare studies ... a palpable change in critical paradigms has taken place ... Organic unity has been replaced by a Postmodern poetics of de-centering ... As a result, disintegration, although not that particular term, has reappeared in Shakespeare studies in a quiet way: in some ways ... it seems never to have completely left. (1991, 121)

In 1981, the idea of collaboration in book-making was compellingly argued in a long essay entitled 'Typography and Meaning' in which D.F. McKenzie examines the material composition of the 1710 edition of Congreve's *Works* and develops his 'general theory of textual criticism which would embrace the history of the book' (2002b, 201). Arguing that '*all* signs have meaning' (206), McKenzie formulates a view of the text in which all the elements, verbal and non-verbal, and all related activities and actors collaborating to the making of a book should be taken into consideration as concurring to the text's meaning: 'forms effect meaning' (2004, 13) is the axiom behind his project which, he says, 'is best described perhaps as "a sociology of the text"' (2002b, 200)³⁸.

³⁶ The Archive at Dulwich College, London, contains the Henslowe-Alleyn papers, left to the College by its founder, Edward Alleyn. Many of the documents have been digitized and are freely available online (<www.henslowe-alleyn.org.uk>).

³⁷ The 1960s and 1970s are the years of the Author's death: most famously, in Roland Barthes' essay 'La mort de l'auteur' (1968) and in Foucault's 'Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?' (1969). In spite of the enormous influence of those two texts which, in different ways, redefined and reshaped the author as a discursive formation, the category of author was after a while resuscitated, and that of authorship freshened and energized.

³⁸ In an essay published the same year, Stephen Orgel develops a similar reasoning. He writes that 'the author is a curiously shadowy figure'; and considers that 'when we write about a Lippi painting or an Inigo Jones drawing, are we really writing about Lippi or Jones? Aren't we, at the very least, writing about a complex collaboration in which the question of authority bears precisely on our notions of the nature of the artist's invention?' (1991, 84, 85). Jeffrey Masten says that even 'Censorship ... is a further participant in the production of the theatrical meaning in this period' (1997, 15).

Introducing the French translation of McKenzie's *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, Roger Chartier comments on this idea:

A text is always lodged in a materiality: that of the written object which contains it, that of the voice which reads or recites it, that of the representation which illustrates it. Each of its formal elements is organized according to neat structures which play an essential role in the process of meaning production ... the book's format, the page layout, the text's partitions, the typographical conventions hold an "expressive function" and carry the meaning. Organised according to either the author's or the printer's intention, these formal devices aim at constraining the reception, at controlling the interpretation, at qualifying the text. (1991, 6; my trans.)

Another innovative and influential contribution to the idea of the social construction of authoriality and meaning, Jerome McGann's *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism*, was published in 1983. Similarly to, but probably independently from McKenzie's considerations, the book argues for 'a socialized concept of authorship and textual authority' (8). Commenting on the 'Introductory Statement' prepared in 1977 by the MLA Center for Scholarly Editions, McGann observes that

Implicit in it are ideas about the nature of literary production and textual authority which so emphasize the autonomy of the isolated author as to distort our theoretical grasp of the "mode of existence of a literary work of art" (a mode of existence which is fundamentally social rather than personal). (*Ibid.*)

Contrasting views of textual authoriality 'grounded in a Romantic conception of literary production', McGann develops 'a fully elaborated argument for a socialized concept of authorship and textual authority' (*ibid.*); and, formulating a deep critique of the idea of 'final authorial intentions', he disputes the philological tradition that tried to figure what the author has really written, even identifying this in an imagined, eclectic text which never existed.

Gabriel Egan notes that *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* appeared 'In the midst of the work on *King Lear*' (2010, 146), that is, while the editors of the Oxford Shakespeare *Complete Works* (Wells and Taylor 1986a) were pondering over the innovative decision to publish the Quarto and the Folio texts of *King Lear* separately. It is not easy, however, to see a direct influence of either McKenzie's or McGann's considerations in the Wells and Taylor edition; more probably, and also more interestingly, certain ideas and perspectives were in the air and were diffused by forms of cultural dissemination.³⁹

The 1986 Oxford edition is accompanied by a *Textual Companion*, where a long chapter by Gary Taylor entitled 'The Canon and Chronology of Shakespeare's Plays', which devotes attention to attribution studies, appeared (Wells *et al.* 1987, 69-144). Commenting on what he believes to have been a radical change, John Jowett affirms that 'Since then, collaboration and textual multiplicity have been established elements in our textual landscape. For in the

³⁹ That certain innovative ideas about texts transmitted in multiple versions were rife in the 1970s and 1980s is shown, in a quite different context, by the French *critique génétique* and by certain developments of Italian philology. Two theoretical statements, elaborated far from the *King Lear* laboratory, may serve as a comment on Wells and Taylor's decision to present two independent texts of Shakespeare's tragedy: 'If one uses [the term 'variant'], one implies, and is bound to consider, that there is *one* text with *multiple* versions, while the only rigorous attitude should posit at each stage *two* texts' (Bellemin-Noël 1972, 13, my trans.); '... strictly speaking, one might argue that, even in the case of variants which appear in the same text, we are facing, in linguistic terms, subsequent texts superimposed in the same space and identifiable, by way of abstraction, as subsequent layers' (Segre 1985, 79; my trans.). That *each version of a text*, however impermanent and unfinished, should be considered as the outcome of an independent act of textualization was the basic assumption of all these trends of reflection.

postmodern era the imperative to preserve organic unity holds little command ... Our Shakespeare is a disintegrated Shakespeare' (2014, 182).

It is not an easy task to establish whether, with the 1986 Oxford Edition, 'the struggle for Shakespeare's text' underwent a revolution or a restoration; indeed, the Oxford edition has been defined by some as 'a belated vindication of Fleay and the New Shakspeare Society' (Grady 1991, 122).

10. *Machine-Disintegrated Shakespeares*

The underlying idea of computer-assisted authorship attribution studies is that 'writers leave subtle and persistent traces of a distinctive style through all levels of their syntax and lexis' (Craig and Kinney 2009, xvi).⁴⁰ Naturally, more and more discriminating and sophisticated inquiries are needed if we acknowledge the fact that the corpus of early modern English playtexts has been acknowledged to be, to a substantial extent, co-authored. The field is ample and variegated, the methods are various: some time concurring and some other time dissenting. Gabriel Egan comments discouragingly on the results of these inquiries saying that 'in empirical studies ... investigators do readily change their minds when new evidence emerges' (2017, 44).⁴¹ Fundamental methodological disagreements (as to what kind of linguistic elements to use, how numerous strings of words may present reliable samples, how extensive a corpus of texts can give appropriate answers, etc.) continually arise; and even more basic perplexities have arisen among researchers, which seem to perturb the field and even to affect its results. Darren Freebury-Jones argues that

many modern attributionists seem to treat plays as mere texts to be number-crunched; they rely on high-grade statistical tests that denude words and phrases of their contexts of use, and place emphasis on quantity, with little acknowledgement of the qualitative aspects of shared textual features ... the gallimaufry of competing methodologies and discrepant conclusions ... has left authorship studies in a state of chaos. (2018, 61)⁴²

⁴⁰ Jeffrey Masten raises relevant, but largely disregarded, objections to the idea that authors' styles are distinct and distinguishable: on the one hand, he argues, personal styles may undergo a process of assimilation and contagion owing to close collaborative practice; on the other, 'the collaborative project in the theatre was predicated on *erasing* the perception of any differences' (1997, 17). More recently, Will Sharpe has been even more drastic: '... a writer could be modifying their style to accommodate the abilities or limitations of their co-author, or closely working together with them to make the play feel more of a piece'; there may also be 'conscious or unconscious imitation of the style of the other writer on the part of the collaborator ... We could equally be seeing a writer imitating the style of a writer not involved in the collaboration, or subtly plagiarizing little poetic flourishes or images that appealed to them from another writer's plays. One writer could be revising the other's work, or they could both have contributed passages and lines to the same scene as they were composing it, thus commixing and complicating the stylistic data we want or expect to find ... we need to consider that both writers may be present within a single scene, or even a single speech' (2013, 648). The issue of imitation is treated briefly in the section 'Imitation' in Taylor and Duhaime 2017, 90-91.

⁴¹ Joseph Rudman's radical opinion is that a valid non-traditional attribution study is not attainable given the present-day state of the science (2016); doubts about the outcome of stylometric analysis are expressed by John Jowett: 'The humanities community is still struggling to understand how to identify a valid or invalid procedure and to negotiate an unexpected finding' (2007, 19); Tiffany Stern says that 'Modern critics, struggling to "discover" which of a handful of collaborative authors wrote which passage of a play, are not always asking the right question' (2009, 30); Thomas Betteridge and Gregory Thompson say that the outcome of 'even the most rigorous attribution studies' is 'to produce what the critic already knows is true' (2016, 263). There are also frankly negationist positions: Jeffrey Masten, Jowett says, 'favours a principle of collaboration that erases authorial voice and describes the text in terms of socially constructed language that is not the special preserve of individual writers' (2007, 22). Masten's effective and successful formula is his definition of collaboration as 'a dispersal of author/ity, rather than a simple doubling of it' (1997, 19).

⁴² The article is a review of the *The New Oxford Shakespeare Complete Set* (Taylor *et al.* 2016, Taylor and Egan 2017). One of the main disagreements between, on the one hand, Darren Freebury-Jones and Brian Vickers and, on the other, the Oxford Shakespeare team concerns the composition of Thomas Kyd's canon. See, for a discussion of this issue, Freebury-Jones 2019.

This is a quasi-philosophical point, to which I will add a purely bibliographical one that I do not see made elsewhere: what is the impact, in terms of authorship consciousness and comprehension, of the fact that attribution studies have completely abandoned the examination of original editions to resort exclusively to databases and digital versions?⁴³

In 2016, a new Oxford edition of Shakespeare's *Complete Works* appeared (Taylor *et al.* 2016). This edition, too, was accompanied by a *Textual Companion* (Taylor and Egan 2017). Gary Taylor's introductory essay to the *Companion* opens with the Beckett fragment from *Textes pour rien* which also opened Foucault's 'Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?': 'Qu'importe qui parle?'. Taylor argues against Foucault's indifference to authorship and to the idea that 'The author is the enemy of literary, critical, interpretative, and intellectual freedom' (2017, 3). 'What is the importance, *to us*', he says, 'four centuries after Shakespeare's death and burial, of the hypothesis that some scenes of the play *Edward III* were written by the same hand that wrote the long narrative poem *Lucrece*?' (6). His answer evokes the category of ethics and the 'pragmatic imperative of interpretation' as a necessary feature:

... modern editors and modern readers have an ethical obligation to give Shakespeare – or any other author/artisan – credit for the work he did in making the artefact that we are using. But the logic of editorial attribution is founded on more than an ethical principle; it is also, and equally, driven by the pragmatic imperatives of interpretation ... all our interpretations began, not with listening to a voice, not with reading a mass-produced printed text, but with the historical act of an authorial hand writing and then the subsequent act of someone else deciphering authorial handwriting. (25)

What Taylor says about the ratio governing attribution in the volume is that 'A text is included in our edition of Shakespeare's *Complete Works* only if Shakespeare's nerves and muscles, wit and hand, performed the labour of writing *for others* at least part of it' (14). Which was the method to identify those works we know from Gabriel Egan: 'all of the fresh attribution claims made with confidence in the *New Oxford Shakespeare* are based on multiple, independent tests pointing the same way. This is how the field progresses' (2017, 46).⁴⁴ Which are the works 'where Shakespeare's nerves and muscles, wit and hand' have been identified we know from the Contents page, that is particularly interesting concerning the issue of dispersion and authorial disintegration. The list of 18 plays (some belonging to the original canon, some added to it) in which Shakespeare appears with diverse roles (as original author of later revised or adapted plays, as co-author, as reviser of his, other playwrights' or anonymous plays, as compiler of additions, or as co-author of lost plays) has raised feelings of concern and uneasiness in many Shakespeare scholars.⁴⁵

⁴³ About the distance from 'the book' being actuated by digital scholarly editions, Paul Eggert poses a vital question: 'Will digital edition afford us the same mixture of reactions that their printed counterparts do? Or will the logic of the different medium dictate other, unpredictable outcomes?' (2019, 2). Doyle Calhoun discusses digital editions as 'a system of gains and losses': 'a print edition', he says, 'cannot be "made digital" without the potential ... loss of valued features associated with the original physical medium' (2017, 146).

⁴⁴ Chapter 25 of the *Companion* (Taylor and Loughnane 2017) gives an ample account of the edition's construction of the canon.

⁴⁵ Contacted by the *Times Higher Education* for a comment on the new attributions, Brian Vickers described the 'publication of the *New Oxford Shakespeare* as a crisis for our discipline' and said that he would call for the institution of 'a Committee for the Protection of Shakespeare's Text' (Reisz 2017). Quite substantial objections were made also by Lars Engle and Eric Rasmussen (2017-2018); Ed Pechter notes that, 'the *New Oxford Shakespeare* puts collaboration and attribution at the center of Shakespearean studies not just in magnitude but in value' (2018, 232); and concludes that 'Shakespearean collaboration is being inflated these days' (236).

Obviously, the opportunity for exploiting and appropriating the disintegration of the canon performed by the *New Oxford* editors was tempting for anti-Stratfordians; and indeed, in the first months of 2018, a collection of essays entitled *My Shakespeare: The Authorship Controversy* (Leahy 2018a) was published. The book contains seven essays in which the credentials of as many alleged authors of the canon are illustrated. The last essay, by the editor, is entitled 'My (Amalgamated) Shakespeare'. Commenting on the *New Oxford Shakespeare* and its *Companion*, William Leahy says that 'These publications are, in effect the initial universal step in the disintegration of Shakespeare of Stratford as the author of the plays and poems traditionally attributed to him from within the orthodox academic Shakespeare community itself' (2018b, 190).⁴⁶

With Leahy's essay we go back to Delia Bacon's suggestion that 'many hands were involved in the plays'. 'Perhaps', Leahy says, 'a number of university-educated and erudite individuals were involved in the writing of the plays, each with his own special talents and knowledge to contribute' (198) Leahy has an easy job to turn the tables to his advantage by reporting the long list of collaborations which appear in the *Authorship Companion*, the omnipresence of 'Anonymous' and the many question marks which are appended to the plays' titles. *The New Oxford Shakespeare* orthodox editors, he says, affirm the idea 'that the *First Folio* is the work of many hands', creating an entity similar to what elsewhere he has defined as 'an amalgamation of authors' (204); and it is disconcerting that, from the opposite side of the textual barricade, John Jowett asks himself: 'How much amputation can the authorial body endure?' (2014, 172).

11. *Disintegrating Biography*

In a book entitled *Le petit x*, the social historian Sabina Loriga discusses various forms of relationship holding between biography and history. She explains the title of her book quoting Gustav Droysen who, in his *Historik*, said that, if we postulate that A is the total sum of all an individual thinks, does, possesses, and so on, then A is constituted by $a + x$; where a is what the individual gets from the external circumstances and x is his or her personal disposition, what makes up the individual's singularity (Loriga 2012, 15-16).

Shakespeare's a and x have been searched in a numerically unrivalled corpus of biographical investigations since Nicholas Rowe presented, in his 1709 *Account*, the basic factual information about Shakespeare's life together with a few of the 'myths' coming from variously reliable sources.

All biographical genres have been experimented: the incomplete, the over-complete, the fictional, the tentative, the conjectural, the sentimental, the ungentle, the intellectual, the insightful, the revealing, the mythical, the unorthodox, the imaginative, the documentary, the texts-derived, as well as all kinds of mixed forms. In recent years, however, a new kind of biography has been experimented: that which disintegrates Shakespeare's life by paying attention to fragments.⁴⁷ Concentrating on the fragment, or on secondary figures that become the centre of attention relegating the main character to the background, these biographies are interesting precisely because they enact various forms of fragmentation and de-centralization. Not surprisingly, this new biographical trend has been described as 'a kind of "disintegrationist"'

⁴⁶ In a review of the *New Oxford Shakespeare Authorship Companion*, a group of 'Oxfordians' affirm that 'the *Authorship Companion* represents an astonishing amount of energy directed at delegitimizing and dethroning Shakespeare' (Dudley *et al.* 2017, 205).

⁴⁷ I am referring to Shapiro 2005 and 2015; Greer 2007; Nicholl 2007; Holderness 2011; Edmonson and Wells 2015; Bearman 2016.

movement in Shakespeare biography' (Holderness 2015, 75).⁴⁸ The idea of 'disintegration' is once again with us, and, once again, we must interpret it.

For Shakespearean biography, disintegration means, in many ways, what it means for his texts: it foregrounds comparatively neglected corners of his life, narrowing the scope of research and concentrating on fragments; it gives prominence to people and institutions which, more or less continuously or intensely, were associated with him. Above all, a disintegrationist biography depicts a character collaborating with other characters and institutions that, in a way, co-authored his life, thus suggesting and practicing, precisely as attribution studies do, a dilution of Shakespeare-centrism. By acknowledging collaboration, attribution studies are paying a price to the integrity and authoriality of the Shakespeare canon; by accepting 'that Shakespeare's lives are multiple and discontinuous, and yet they are facets of a single life' (Holderness 2015, 78), biography loses the advantage of sole-focalization to gain that of casting a social light on characters and events that only in a narrow perspective can be considered simply personal. A disintegrationist biography, in other words, shows that lives, no less than texts, are co-authored and bear traces of intentions and meanings which are not only a single person's choice; for, no less than a text, a life is a socially composed construct.⁴⁹

The instances I have been quoting are maybe not yet examples of a sociological turn in biographical speculation that may renovate the nature of biography itself; but, once again, it is looking at Shakespeare that experiments are being attempted and new perspectives explored.

12. *Concluding Remarks*

Texts change. They change as the physical composition and the different conventions of their representation mutate. As Roger Chartier puts it,

when the "same" text is apprehended through very different mechanisms of representation, it is no longer the same. Each of its forms obeys specific conventions that mold and shape the work according to the laws of that form and connect it, in different ways, with other arts, other genres, and other texts. (1995, 2)

Texts also (and consequently) change in readers' perception and contextualization. Paul Eggert argues that this happens because the world around them changes and, as time and cultural contexts mutate, texts are cast 'into frames of reference or into discourses that change what, in an important sense, they are' (2009, 13). Jerome McGann, in turn, describes change as 'The textual condition's only immutable law':

Every text enters the world under determinate socio-historical conditions, and while these conditions may and should be variously defined and imagined, they establish the horizon within which the life history of different texts can play themselves out. The law of change declares that these histories will exhibit a ceaseless process of textual development and mutation – a process which can only be arrested if all the textual transformations of a particular work fall into nonexistence. (1991, 9)

⁴⁸ Discussing fragmented or atomized biographies which tend to discard chronology, Matti Peltonen speaks of 'sideways' biography (2014, 116).

⁴⁹ Introducing the concept of 'relational life-writing', Donatella Pallotti highlights a perspective elaborated, among others, by Smith and Watson (2010) who, she says, 'argued that all auto/biographies may be considered relational' (in Antonielli and Pallotti 2019, xiv; my trans.). Smith and Watson say that 'one's story is bound up with that of another', in that 'the boundaries of an "I" are often shifting and permeable' (2010, 86).

But texts also change when they are subjected to certain processes of transmission, restoration, conservation and interpretation. Under these processes, and according to the use of different technologies apt to actualize them, they cross the walkways of tradition where they meet other texts, other textualities, new readers and interpreters, and also new manipulators.

These complex and varied processes do not only produce changes in the texts themselves: they also, either gradually or abruptly, construct changing images of their authors. In J. McGann's already quoted statement, 'The universe of literature is socially generated and does not exist in a steady state. Authors themselves do not have, *as authors*, singular identities' (1991, 75). In other words, socially and materially orientated editorial conceptions shape and condition not only the idea of text and of 'the textual condition', but also that of Author.

In 1986, D.F. McKenzie inaugurated the Panizzi Lectures at the British Museum Library with a talk entitled 'The Book as an Expressive Form' (2004, 9-30). He had started his controversial bibliographic reflection in the 1960s, and in 1969 he published his now universally acclaimed essay 'Printers of the Mind' (2002c, 13-85), where he argued for an entirely new bibliographic reading of the concurrent labour in the production of books and the relationship between forms of bibliographic habits and meaning-production.⁵⁰ His 'sociology of the texts' highlights, among other things, the collaborative composition not only of the material artefacts in which texts are contained, but also – and consequently – of the texts' meaning.⁵¹

McKenzie's re-orientation of bibliographic investigation 'in service of more comprehensive understandings of how meanings are made' (McDonald and Suarez 2002, 3) was continued by Jerome McGann, who developed the idea of a 'universe of literature' which is 'socially generated', and argued for 'a socialized concept of authorship and textual authority' (1983, 8).

Central to both McKenzie's and McGann's theoretical elaboration is the idea of the collaborative composition of texts, of the concurring professional and institutional labour in the dynamics of the configuration and transmission of documents; in other words, the idea of a socialized construction of meaning. In other words, implicit at the basis of the collaborative idea of texts' composition and transmission, is the notion of the distribution of human labour: of who did what, and how not only in terms of writing, but also in terms of manuscript copying and transmission, of more or less professional manipulation, and finally in terms of printing-house habits, texts migrated from authors to readers; and how, owing to their various migrations, their meanings were shaped and re-shaped. Inevitably, these ideas also lead to a deconstruction, distribution and disintegration of the idea of Author.

Rightly, Gary Taylor draws a distinction between the different kinds of collaboration we are talking about when considering the different activities of inventing-writing and editing-printing: 'The early printed editions of Shakespeare's works depend on collaboration, but we should carefully distinguish the collaborative milieu of the London printing trade from collaboration between playwrights' (2017, 20).

But, while a distinction between these two lines of reflection allows us to better evaluate their different claims and achievements, equally important it is not to keep them altogether distinct. It is indeed crucial to note that, during the last decades of the twentieth century, two different trends of reflection on the textual condition, elaborated independently from one another, have envisaged a socialized view of text- and meaning-construction built up on the idea of the division

⁵⁰ For a useful assessment of the development of McKenzie's thought and work, see McDonald and Suarez 2002.

⁵¹ D.F. McKenzie was the first to call attention to the importance of the material artefacts in which texts are embodied in the construction of meaning. McKenzie talks of 'forms of visual evidence in the books themselves as determinants of meaning' (2004, 4). His famous formula was 'forms effect meaning' (*ibid.*, 13).

of labour: of how and to what end human labour is organized. On the one hand, the bibliographic perspective of the McKenzie-McGann-Chartier line of thinking maintained that not only books, but also, and more importantly texts, are socially composed and that their meaning is distributed among the professionals and the institutions which materially shape them; on the other, the idea of the collaborative composition of texts aims at acknowledging the diverse *hands* (in both senses of the word) which *make* texts and their meanings. Composing texts and making books are part of two different paradigms, but, conjointly, they compose a field of reflection in which *tout se tient*. Indeed, Gary Taylor seems to have perceived the connections operating in these two different areas when, a few pages after the statement quoted above, he reshapes the idea of *writer* by describing it as artisan or *wrighter*, using the verb *make* to explicitly characterize the author's activity as a material gesture, 'by re-conceptualizing authorship as artisan labour'. 'As suggested by the early modern English words *playwright* and *stagewright*', Taylor says, 'an author is comparable to a *shipwright* or *cartwright*'. If 'An author is a "wrighter"' (2017, 22), 'A co-author is another wrighter, a fellow artisan, a fellow maker, at work on the same object' (23). Here we perceive a (necessary) slipping from the area in which a 'socialized idea of bibliography' is described as producing meaning in the editing of texts and in the making of books and in text-configuration, to that of the collaborative creation of texts as concurring to meaning-production: from the work of scribes and binders, to that of literary creators (and co-creators).

My contention, in the present article, has been to describe disintegration as one of the main factors of change in the configuration of texts and in the construction of the author. The Author Shakespeare was, from the beginning of his career as poet and playwright, substantially constructed on the mutations produced by text-and-authorship issues of disintegration. In turn, theories and practices of disintegration have had a conspicuous impact on the construction and comprehension of the professional context in which players and playwrights, together with the constellation of various assistant professionals, worked to set up the cultural experience we call the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre. No scholar today calls into question the fact that this cultural experience was essentially collaborative, that many of these texts whose integrity textual critics have been struggling to establish are the fruits of co-authorship and collaboration.

Shakespeare criticism has proceeded from early ideas about disintegration and distribution of authorship, to different forms of de-centralization, to the present effort to distinguish the texts, or portions of texts attributable to his hand from those attributable to the hands of concurring authors; and also, to a revival of the pristine idea of the distribution of Shakespeare's plays among different individual intellectuals. This has been and is an incessant effort, for Shakespeare's works have never 'fall[en] into nonexistence'. Indeed, the urge to establish the correct distribution of authorial responsibility in certain texts has helped to invent new tools for textual scholarship and new methods of text-examination; and there are no signs yet that – to quote the title of Gabriel Egan's book – 'the struggle for Shakespeare's text' will fall into nonexistence.

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