

Re-Reading “*Greenes Groatsworth of Wit*”

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ABSTRACT

This essay focuses on the alleged attack by Robert Greene on Shakespeare as an “upstart crow,” a work reprinted in almost every collection of Shakespeare’s works, and a document that has produced its own body of scholarly assessment. Employing recent textual criticism of the print industry in early modern England—including works by Zachary Lesser, John Jowett, Jeffery Masten, and D. Allen Carroll—we re-read “*Green’s Groatsworth of Wit*” as a kind of literary criticism that helps to illuminate both its own textual status as well as the material conditions of the late sixteenth-century theatrical world which produced it. Following a review of the basic lines of interpretation of the piece, I examine the nexus of the Henry Chettle, Robert Danter and Greene connection, in an attempt to show that by considering the “collaboration” between these three, we should come to a better understanding of the document itself. Equally important, by re-examining the text, reviewing the printing process, and rethinking the authorial voice of the work, I hope to re-situate the pamphlet’s place in the present debate on Shakespeare and his contemporaries.

1. Introduction

Base minded men all three of you, if by my miserie you be not warnd,” Robert Greene allegedly proclaimed to his fellow University Wits in 1592. After narrowing his attack toward “those Puppets, (I meane) that speke from our mouths, those Anticks garnisht in our colours,” Greene then moves into the most famous lines in the text: “Yes, trust them not: for there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tyger’s heart wrapt in a Players hyde*, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you: and being an absolute *Johannes fac totum*, is in his owne conceit the only *Shake-scene* in a countrye.” He concludes by pleading that his fellow playwrights, specifically Christopher Marlowe, Thomas

Nashe, and George Peele, employ their “rare wits . . . in more profitable courses” (Carroll, 1994: 83-85).

Reprinted in almost every introduction to Shakespeare’s works, this outburst has generated its own body of literature, a “jungle of critical and biographical” interpretation, according to Greg (1967: 51). After Greene’s death, it fell to Henry Chettle, who prepared a fair copy of the pamphlet for printing. A year earlier, Chettle had entered into a business relationship with William Hoskins and John Danter, both stationers. Together the group published a number of ballads, a few plays, including an often-disparaged version of the first quarto of *Romeo and Juliet*, and other tracts and pamphlets.

A great deal of critical attention has recently focused on the early modern printing industry and stationers such as Danter and Chettle. As Lesser points out, printers as well as publishers “differ significantly from their customers” for they “must read not only for themselves, but for others”. In other words a “publisher’s job is not just to read texts but to predict how others will read them”. He goes on to add that while the consumption aspect of a work is important—that is the reading of printed works or the auditing of performance ones— Lesser suggests that “we also need to look at moments of *production*” by those workers “whose careers depended on their readings of texts and their assessment of the likely readings of their customers”. Lesser concludes that the “history of publishing is itself a history of reading, and every . . . publication is already a piece of literary criticism” (2004: 8).

Keeping this idea in mind, this essay will re-read the *Groatsworth* attack as a kind of literary criticism that will help illuminate both texts and contexts of the late sixteenth-century theatrical climate in London. Following a review of the basic lines of interpretation of the piece, we will examine the nexus of the Chettle, Danter, Greene connection, in an attempt to show that by considering the “collaboration” between these three, we should come to a better understanding of the document itself. Equally important, by 1) re-examining the text, 2) reviewing the printing process, and, 3) rethinking the authorial voice of the work, I hope 4) to re-situate the pamphlet’s place in the current debate on Shakespeare and his contemporaries.

2. Re-visioning the text

The opening lines of the work insult performers as mere “Puppets” and “Anticks” who gain their signification only when “granisht” with the “colours” of the playwrights. Since “antics” were the buffoon clown actors, the insult suggests that the University Wits are the real artists by filling up the actors’ empty forms with substance, including, in Carroll’s description, “figures,” “ornaments” or “rhetorical modes” they had learned during their education. In other words, these lowly actors have been gussied up, not only in “make-up or costumes,” but also in speech, by the direction of the playwrights in charge (1994: n. 2, 84).

Jowett claims that while “the exact nature of Shakespeare’s trespass is unclear,” the “underlying protest is against Shakespeare as a mere player who muscles into the craft of the playwright, arrogantly taking it upon himself to imitate or appropriate or pad out the plays of the established dramatists” (Jowett, 2007: 7). Certainly, this idea may help to explain the

nearly seething resentment in *Groatsworth*, whether composed by Chettle or Greene, since there is no record of either of them in performance.

Duncan-Jones argues most persuasively for Shakespeare's role as an actor based on the "attack" and on Chettle's subsequent apology. After showing how the invective must be directed at a player, for they were the "Puppets" of the university writers in Greene's dismissive metaphor, she adds that this attack was not necessarily a cutting remark about the actors' abilities: "It is precisely because their acting is effective" that "Greene" is so envious, she explains. "Speaking splendid lines" some of these players had become "considerably more powerful and widely admired than the poets "to whom they [should] have been beholding" (2011: 37-38). Moreover, the "bombast" spouted out by them may refer not just to written matter, but, more likely in Duncan-Jones's assessment, "extemporized blank verse" added during a performance itself (2011: 39). If an actor did this, and if the audience "responded most strongly" to these improvisations rather than the lines provided by poets such as Greene, it would "be sure to annoy the original poets" (2011: 39).

The upstart "crow" reference is equally intriguing. If the crow is from Aesop's fable, it suggests a mimic, in other words a bumptious actor spouting "theatrical bombast" (Mentz, 2008: 122). According to Aesop's tale, "Now the jackdaw [crow], realizing his own ugliness, went around gathering up the feathers which fell from other birds, which he then arranged and attached to his own body. Thus he became the most handsome of all" (1998: 119). If it is from Horace, however, it may suggest plagiarism, the borrowing of rhetorical "feathers," the "tools of the literary trade" (2008: 122). And it is possible that in the mind of Elizabethan readers, these images were not that distinct from one another. One significant point is that this first reference in print to Shakespeare borrows heavily from the rhetorical training of the University Wits, for both Horace and Aesop were also central to the curriculum of the time. The line that follows is the deliberately misquoted phrase from Shakespeare's *3 Henry VI*: The "*Tyger's heart wrapt in a Players hyde.*" According to Shapiro, the line "illustrates the way in which parodic attempts [Greene's single line adaptation of Queen Margaret's speech in *3 Henry VI*] to contain a rival can boomerang, serving instead to confirm and legitimate the target of parody". In any event, even though the tract was "intended as invective," the very allusion to Shakespeare shows just "how great a threat the young actor was becoming to the leading dramatists of the day," specifically the university-educated playwrights (1991: 5).

The tension between the two groups seems to suggest an "us" (the University Wits) versus "them" (actors and provincial playwrights) attitude, as Greene, of course, sides with the underpaid and underemployed fellow scholars of London, writing, in large part, for the playhouses. I would concur with Carroll, one of the acknowledged experts on *Groatsworth*, who sees the attack this way: "The charge against Shakespeare ought to be seen as part of an ongoing conflict: first, between the University Wits . . . and actors, and second, between the Wits and the new, uneducated professional playwrights" such as Thomas Kyd (Carroll, 1994: 141). The only thing worse than an actor or untrained writer was a provincial upstart such as Shakespeare, who was both player and poet.

The final two lines twist and transform Shakespeare's name into "Shake-scene" but not before the attack paints this upstart player/playwright as a *Johannes fac totum*, most often glossed as a "jack-of-all trades"; according to the *OED*, however, at the time Greene was

writing, the phrase also meant “a would-be universal genius” (Carroll, 1985: 114). Equally significant, but less discussed, is that “a *factotum* is and was a printing term for an ornamental surround that will take any capital letter in its middle,” according to Jowett (1993: 482). If we apply this notion to Greene’s attack, it seems to call Shakespeare a person who is “impressively ornamental and very versatile, but empty within and incapable of textual signification” (Jowett 1993: 483). This focus on the printing and compositing of the work vis-à-vis the message, authorship, and collaborative design of the insult should illuminate our understanding, if not of its specific intent, certainly of its widespread impact.

3. Re-viewing the printing process

As noted earlier Henry Chettle prepared the fair copy¹ of *Groatsworth* for printing. Chettle was born into a family of dyers, and he was apprenticed to the trade in 1577. In 1591, he entered into a business relationship with William Hoskins and John Danter, both stationers. The emergence of the stationers and their trade is crucial in considering this mystery, for their occupation was exploding on a par with that of the theatrical world. For instance, in 1564, the year of Shakespeare’s birth, 93 printed titles are listed in the Stationer’s Register; by 1592, the year of *Groatsworth*, the number had more than tripled to 294 (Smith, 2007: 18-19). The symbiotic relationship between playwriting and publishing is emphasized by Jowett: “the activity of professional theatre gave rise to opportunities in the field of book publication, by way of either the publication of a play or, as with *Groatsworth*, the publication of a pamphlet making journalistic capital out of the theatre” (2007: 8).

Danter’s role is equally complicated, and a number of older critics have condemned Danter in general, including Pollard (1967: 40, 48) and Greg (1919: 197). But lest we forget, Danter did print *Titus Andronicus* on 6 February 1594. As Hughes explains in his introduction to the *New Cambridge Titus Andronicus* (2nd ed., 2006), while we cannot be “certain” that this was Shakespeare’s play and not a prose history, most scholarly sources, including the *Oxford Companion to Shakespeare*, list Danter as the printer of the play (Hughes, 2006: 1; Dobson and Wells, 2001: 356). Bate’s “Introduction” to the *Arden* edition of the play also cites Danter as the printer. He even defends the allegedly hurried printing, arguing that “imminent closure of the theatres” forced the quick publishing, a direct consequence of a new outbreak of the plague (1995: 70). This was bad timing indeed, particularly since the edict occurred “so soon after the premiere of” a very successful new play (1995: 70). Using figures from Henslowe’s *Diary*, Bate estimates the profits “were among the best of the season”; it was performed twice more within three weeks’ time, the additional performances being equally successful (1995: 70). The upshot was that the “players decided to make some money on it from another source and sold it to Danter, who rushed it into print while it was still new” on 6 February (1995: 70). In other words, Danter was working with, not against, Henslowe’s acting company and those writing for him such as Shakespeare. Even Hughes ultimately admits that Danter’s reputation is “worse than he deserves” (Hughes 2006: 1), and the printer is also associated with the publishing works by Lodge, Robert Wilson, and George Peele among others.

I would argue, however, that Greg overstates the case by proclaiming that “Danter’s short career is nothing but a record of piracy and secret printing,” specifically with regard to Danter’s printing of the so-called bad quarto (Q1) of *Romeo and Juliet*. Jowett speculates that Chettle may have added to the “stage directions and dialogue” of this quarto; if so it would be Chettle’s “earliest dateable dramatic composition” (2011: 16-17). In tracing Danter’s career, Sheavyn connects him with writers such as Greene: “For the lower forms of literature—ballads, catchpenny pamphlets, and such— John Danter was the printer most popular. He was evidently rather poor and struggling, glad to print for other stationers, and glad to get hold of popular things, cheap to buy and produce, readily salable . . .” (1909: 68). Danter also “proved very useful to certain struggling [and] needy writers,” including Greene in “his later, sensational days” adds Sheavyn, and she concludes that “in spite of dealing with somewhat sensational literature” Danter does not seem “to have been more unscrupulous than other publishers” (1909: 69).

The partnership of Chettle, Danter and Hoskins probably ended in 1597, when Danter’s shop was raided by the authorities and his presses were destroyed, although their association was strained long before that time. In April of that year, his printing machines and pica letters were “ordered to be made unserviceable for printing” after being seized by government officials (Lavin, 1970: 24). The seizure was due, however, not to piracy of any sort, but instead resulted from Danter’s printing of an unauthorized Catholic tract, the *Jesus Psalter*; but because this was the same year as the printing of the “bad” quarto of *Romeo and Juliet*, some critics equate the closure of his press with piracy. While I am not defending Danter completely, it seems that both he and Chettle have suffered from many false accusations, and, like the notion that Robert Greene solely, and resentfully, penned *Groatsworth*, such legends need to be examined for accuracy and then modified when necessary. Like hearing a familiar tune sung with new words, these interpretations may at first sound discordant; yet a careful listening of the entire score may reveal novel notes of interest and importance.

4. Re-imagining the “author”

Until the later part of the twentieth century, most scholars believed that Greene was the sole author of the work. Many critics still agree in part with that assessment. In the last twenty-five years, however, many scholars have altered their position. One group believes it was Greene’s work in essence, even if Chettle did edit it, while the second group, led by Austin and then supported by Jowett, think that Chettle is the sole author, and they detect only minor rhetorical traces from Greene’s pen; others claim a position somewhere in between, as we will see.

In 1969 Austin’s work entitled *A Computer-Aided Technique for Stylistic Distinction: The Authorship of “Greene’s Groatsworth of Wit”* began to alter forever the way *Groatsworth* would come to be viewed. Although it was not widely published,² his work did generate immediate assaults in established journals. Writing in *The Shakespeare Quarterly* in 1972, for example, Widmann proclaimed that Austin’s study was “ultimately unconvincing” (1972b: 214).⁸ It should be noted, however, that Widmann softened his stance a bit in the same year, when he wrote in *Computing and the Humanities*, that Austin’s work was “not entirely

convincing” (1972a: 17). But the following year, Proudfoot, in his piece in *Shakespeare Survey*, 26 admitted that “[t]he linguistic facts revealed by Austin’s study are open to more than one construction: Chettle’s revision may virtually have constituted authorship (or at least co-authorship) without carrying the implications of fraud or imposture alleged by Austin” (1973: 182).

The debate continued for a quarter of a century until Jowett, primarily, decided the description of “collaboration” was not accurate. The “case for co-authorship by way of revision lacks any positive substantiation,” he proclaimed in 1993, and, he added, “in no linguistic realm does any Greene stratum of writing manifest itself” (1993: 459). He then constructs a compelling case for Chettle’s sole authorship of *Groatsworth*. By borrowing but extending Austin’s analysis, he shows how “the materials available” to Chettle would enable him to “construct his forgery,” correctly surmising that “Chettle’s position as Danter’s editor ...add[s] to a compelling set of circumstances under which such a fabrication could take place” (1993: 475).

So how does a knowledge of the printing trade specifically enhance our understanding of *Groatsworth*? First, Chettle’s role as a compositor could have aided him in any forgery attempt of Greene’s attack. Second, his access to Danter’s press, coupled with Danter’s sometimes less-than-legal behavior, would have granted Chettle access to a press without supervised authority. Finally, the collaborative aspect of most of these printed works, including both pamphlets and many plays, must give us pause in singling out this work as solely by the hand of Robert Greene.

Chettle’s training, particularly as a compositor, would have benefitted him greatly in the rhetorical design. As Carroll explains, “[h]is training and life experience as a compositor would have taught him skills of memory that, as a would-be writer, he could exploit in imitating the styles of others” (1993: 18). Equally important, Carroll adds, compositors “must have good memories, at least short term, in order to hold a line of words in mind while reaching for and placing type,” so Chettle “may have been able, up to a point, to imitate Greene’s style” (1993: 18). That Chettle felt his role in the printing house to be important is evidenced even in his signature on letters: in one dated 1596, he refers to himself as “Your old well-willer: H. C. Printer,” and in a missive to Thomas Nashe at about the same time, he closes with “Your Old Compositor, Henry Chettle” (qtd. in Jenkins, 1934: 14, 17).

In the years just preceding *Groatsworth*’s publication, Chettle seems to have turned most of his attention to literary pursuits, and since Danter had set up another print shop in Duck Lane in late 1591, it would make sense that Chettle was now working as a kind of free agent or journeyman printer. In the fall of 1593 Chettle printed his “first known literary work” *Groatsworth*, but the publisher William Wright added the following in the Stationers’ Register: “Entered for his copie, under master watkins hande vppon the perill of Henrye Chettle” (qtd. in Jenkins, 1934: 8). While Jenkins suggests that entering it at “Chettle’s risk” makes it “more likely that he prepared it for the press out of friendship for Greene than as a commission for the publisher” (1934: 8), it may also be that Wright was worried about the authorship or content of the work. As Sanders elaborates: “The peculiar wording of the entry ... suggests that Wright anticipated trouble over the *Groatsworth* and took care, on entering the work, to free himself from responsibility” (1993: 396).

5. Re-considering the impact

Whatever the case, Greene’s *Groatsworth* must have been passed through a number of hands in the tight-knit London theatrical world,³ for in less than two months, Shakespeare seems to have responded to the attack, so much so that Chettle felt it necessary to attach a note to his next drama explaining his involvement. According to Sanders, “Poverty might have been responsible for the issuing of the *Groatsworth* under false colors” by Chettle, but more significantly, and this suggests that Wright was correct to worry about the effect of the piece, “a defense of it would have been imperative as soon as suspicion fell on it” (1993: 394).

In the “Preface” to his next work, *Kind-Heart’s Dream*, published shortly after Greene’s work (1592), he not only intimates at who the offended parties might be, but he also critiques their alleged personal reputation. First, Chettle denies responsibility for *Groatsworth* but he offers an apology for printing the work. Declaring that Greene, who had died just three months earlier, had left “many papers in sundry Booke sellers hands” including the *Groatsworth* Chettle then explains his role in the work:

To be brief, I writ it over, and, as neare as I could, followed the copy [of Greene’s handwritten version], only in that letter I put something out, but in the whole booke not a word in, for I protest it was all Greene’s, not mine nor Master Nashes [Thomas Nashe] as some unjustly have affirmed. (Chettle, 1841: v).

Nashe called the tract “a scald, trivial, lying pamphlet,” and went on to declare the following: “God never care of my soule, but utterly renounce me if the least word or syllable in it proceeded from my pen, or if I were any way privy to the writing or printing of it” (Nashe, Works, 1904-10, 1:153-54). Protesting too much, perhaps, Chettle’s claim, and the various finger-pointing that seems to have occurred in the close-knit London literary scene, illustrates the blurred lines between collaboration and authorship, compositor and printer. Even those who agree that some shady practices were occurring in the printing trade tend to characterize these acts as “venial” sins, “for the book trade was new and its code differed from that of today” (Wright, 1961: 129).

The rest of the apology is also worth repeating at length:

About three months since died M. Robert Greene, leaving many papers in sundry Booke sellers hands, among other [sic] his Groats-worth of wit, in which, a letter written to divers play-makers, is offensively by one or two of them taken, and because on the dead they cannot be avenged, they wilfully forge in their conceits a living author: and after tossing it to and fro no remedy, but it must light on me. (Chettle 1841: iv)

It is also important to note that Chettle calls the two authors “play-makers” and not writers, poets, and certainly not “players.” This then suggests to most that by the time of *Kind-Heart*, not only Marlowe but also Shakespeare had been writing for the stage long enough for readers to catch the allusion to them.

Chettle then continues with his complex response. Admitting first that “With neither of them that take offence was I acquainted,” he proclaims that “with one of them I care not if I

never be,” obviously, according to almost all scholars, a reference to Marlowe. Turning his attention to Shakespeare, he admits that “divers” other men of supposedly high rank also “have reported” his “uprightness of dealing” as well as his “facetious grace in writing” and excellence in “the qualitie he professes” (Chettle, 1841, iv). The word “quality” here meaning, according to David Bevington, “namely acting” (2010:17). The *OED* confirms this usage in sense 5a referring to “quality” as a “Profession, occupation, business, *esp.* that of an actor” (*OED* online). And while Chettle admits he is also relying on reports about Shakespeare, he was now starting to move in the dramatic circles of the day himself, including collaborations with Anthony Munday.

Even after the publication of *Groatsworth*, suspicious circumstances continued to plague Danter’s and Chettle’s careers. In the 1597 raid on Danter’s presses mentioned earlier, not only was the *Jesus Psalter* confiscated, but the authorities also took 4000 pirated copies of *Grammar and Accidence*, one of the most popular rhetorical books of the late 1500s, yet one whose patent belonged first to Francis Flower and then to John Battersby (Lavin, 1970: 26). Once his presses were seized, Danter seems to have gone into decline, dying the following year. Even his death, however, did not still the rhetoric surrounding him. In Act 1, Scene 3 of the anonymously-penned play, *Part Two of the Return from Parnassus; or the Scourge of Simony*, performed at Cambridge between 1598-1603, “Danter the Printer” is a character who comes on-stage to make an equitable publishing deal with the fictional author, Ingenioso. As Helen Smith explains, Ingenioso is a stand-in for Thomas Nashe, and, in the play, Danter, after complaining to the playwright that he “lost [money] by your last booke,” he finally agrees to pay Ingenioso “40 shillings and an odde pottle of wine” for the new play (2007: 24). Chettle lived a bit longer, and he also continued to use his rhetorical and compositional skills by patching up and sometimes cobbling together various manuscripts of other playwrights. And we know for certain from Philip Henslowe’s *Diary* that he paid Chettle to work on a least thirty-six plays between 1598 and his death in 1603.

But the controversy around *Groatsworth* has continued to grow, and the debate has spread to recent biographies of Shakespeare. Following Jowett’s superb essay demonstrating Chettle’s suspicious involvement, Wells claimed the piece was “perhaps written in part” by Chettle (2002: 49) and Greenblatt decided it was “probably written by Chettle or by someone collaborating with Chettle” (2004: 212). In 2010 Bevington proved a bit more cautious in his book, *Shakespeare and Biography*, characterizing Chettle’s role in the *Groatsworth* authorship controversy as “speculative”; he eventually retreats to firmer ground, concluding that “the whole episode does at least suggest that Shakespeare’s genius as a young dramatist provoked an envious response” in 1592, even if we can not pin down the writer (2010: 16). Most recently, the spotlight has further focused on Chettle, so much so, that in 2011 Duncan-Jones referred to the work as authored by “‘Greene’/Chettle,” that is a work “posthumously ventriloquized by Chettle” (2011: 31, 37).⁴

6. Re-framing the question

For Shakespeare studies, however, this first mention of him in print raises important issues and questions beyond mere authorship of the attack, particularly vis-a-vis Shakespeare's career. So it may be more useful to re-frame the question: instead of continuing to search for a single authoritative voice in *Groatsworth*, perhaps the pamphlet can shed light instead on the contemporary debate over the collaborative process of early modern writers. Considering this first reference to Shakespeare in print as a collaborative process may help to illuminate Shakespeare's own investment in such working conditions and material production. And lest we forget, this very first "known reference to him" also "seems to charge him with reworking the output of other dramatists" (Jowett 2007: 17). It is interesting to wonder if this charge against Shakespeare, coming so early in his career, may have caused him to swerve deliberately away from the collaborative model.

Surely the collaborative model influenced the print world as much as it did the field of performance. While just prior to the late 1600s, poetry was always championed above stage performances, by the turn of the century, this particular distinction began to break down. As Bendrarz explains, "[w]ithout poets, players would be forced back into minstrelsy and crude improvisation; without players, poets were denied the power and prestige of dramatic spectacle" (2001: 230). And, I would add, without printers, the reach of both writers and even actors, would not have been as wide nor as permanent.

We should keep in mind, however, as Hirschfeld reminds us, that the "material conditions of the early modern stage" do not allow for simple or monolithic claims, in part, because "the simultaneously competitive and communal milieu" of the early modern theatre "fostered among the playwrights a variety" of "evolving models"; such "models changed and developed, though not necessarily in any teleological way, in concert with the institutionalization of the theatre" (2001: 340). Of course, part of this institutional development would be the momentum to publish as well as perform plays. For as Jowett points out, "the *Groatsworth* suggests that the print medium had the potential to lift the dramatist out of anonymity; in other words, that the market conditions dictated by the theatre might be resisted by the common interests of dramatists and stationers" (Jowett 2007: 8).

The debate concerning the extent of collaborative writing in this era, particularly for the public theaters, remains unsettled. Until recently, conventional wisdom agreed with Bentley, who claimed in 1991 that "as many as half of the plays by professional dramatists in the period incorporated the writing at some date of more than one man" (1991: 199).⁵ The *Oxford Companion to Shakespeare* repeated the same claim, almost word-for-word in 2002 (80). Most recently, Jackson, writing in 2012, puts the number at 20% between 1590-1614. (32-33). The number increased during James's reign, however, particularly with the Fletcher-Massinger and Middleton-Rowley partnerships, the percentage almost doubling to 38% (Jackson, 2012: 32-3).

Still, as Knapp points out, even if we agree with the alleged 50% figure, that means that the other half of the plays "must have been single-authored, which makes it seem unlikely that collaborative writing so dominated theatrical practice at the time as to render single authorship theoretically unthinkable" (2005: 2-3). Whatever the exact number, almost all

experts agree that collaboration of some sort —between authors, actors, and printers— due in large measure to increasing literacy combined with the rapid expansion of the theatre-going public, occurred extensively during the era when London venues dominated the entertainment options.

While some critics have suggested that these collaborations were driven by expediency, poverty, or both, recent evidence has shown that was not always the case. In the best conditions, which do not seem to have been uncommon, “[d]ramatists appear to have formed loose partnerships or syndicates which worked together for short periods and then broke up and reformed into other alliances” even when allegedly “attached” to one company contractually, as Heywood appears to have been with Worcester’s Men (Carson, 1989: 22). This notion also suggests that at least some playwrights worked as free-agents, “who [seem] to have had considerable control over his own methods of work and to have used that freedom to market his skills, alone or in association with others, to the greatest advantage” (Carson, 1989: 23).

For understanding Chettle, and, ultimately his role in *Groatsworth*, this notion is particularly significant, for on 25 March 1602, Chettle signed an agreement only to work for Henslowe, but the scholarly consensus is that it is “impossible to say” if Chettle complied “fully” with the contract (Jowett, 2001: 17). We do know for certain that in 1592 Chettle tried to pass off an epistle attached to Munday’s translation of *Gerileon*, signing it “Your friend, T.N.” allegedly Thomas Nashe (Jowett, 2001: 16), blaming it later in the Preface to *Kind-Heart’s Dream* as a “workmans error” (Chettle, 1841: v). Obviously, it was not beyond him to skirt the margins of legal and professional ethics, in part, perhaps, because they had not hardened into laws. The point about imitating another writer’s work is addressed by Shapiro, who posits that “[c]ollaboration also bred an unprecedented familiarity,” because “playwrights in the public theaters worked alongside each other,” and were then able to “stitch these group efforts together seamlessly”. He also speculates that the writers were “good at imitating each other’s styles when paid to do so” (Shapiro, 1991: 8). This “seamless stitching” and imitation of voices by writers such as Chettle surely helps to explain the difficulty of untangling the numerous threads running through *Groatsworth*.

7. Re-situating *Groatsworth*

After re-examining the text, the printing process, and the impact of the document, it becomes clear that the position of *Groatsworth* is currently rapidly and radically changing. Of course, the most discussed aspect about the work still concerns the authorial identity of the first document to mention Shakespeare in print. Yet some critics, such as Masten, have advocated new models of what constituted authorship, which are particularly applicable to *Groatsworth* (even though he does not consider the work specifically). Masten raises the important question of what the word “composition” even meant for the early modern period. He asks, for example, if it includes “(Re)writing, Copying” or even “Typesetting,” which he reminds us, and as we saw with Chettle’s signature, was “called ‘composing’” (1997: 15). And he reminds us that “collaborative texts produced before the emergence of authorship are of a kind

different (informed by differing mechanisms of textual property and control, different conceptions of imitation, originality, and the “individual”) than other writings or even collaborative ones produced in “the regime of the author” (1997: 21).

In deciding how to view this work, I would side, finally, with Mentz who points out that the “extant evidence suggests that *Groatsworth* is better read as an unusual form of collaboration” rather than either a “single-author book or a forgery” (2008: 118). Mentz’s astute suggestion is that our new categories of collaboration should not just be “limited to fraught or friendly relations between playwrights,” but instead expanded to include “dead writers, deceptive stationers, forgers and other figures of murky motives and unknown tendencies”. Indeed, as he points out, even Foucault’s “death of the author” is anticipated by Greene, almost in a “literal” fashion, in *Groatsworth* (2008: 130).

For evidence of the re-situation of *Groatsworth*, one need only turn to one of the most canonical of Shakespeare collections, the 2nd edition of the *Riverside Shakespeare*, edited by Tobin and Evans. In “Appendix C: Records, Documents, and Allusions,” they not only print the attack by Greene, but they quietly include Henry Chettle’s apology attached to *Kind-Heart’s Dream* immediately following it (1997: 2001). It is also worth remembering vis-a-vis the publication of *Groatsworth* that “before any of Shakespeare’s plays was issued in print, he already had a reputation that could be exploited in print culture” (Jowett 2007: 7).

By re-reading both documents in the bright light of recent critical studies highlighting the role of publishers such as Danter and Chettle, we should come to a better understanding, not only of the *Groatsworth* text but also of the highly-charged aesthetic context that produced such a work. We may then be able to use the alleged “darkness” of this mysterious primary pamphlet to make visible its surrounding material conditions, specifically those of the printing and performance world of London in the late 1500s.

Notes

1. As Jowett explains, a fair copy is a “transcript copied out by a scribe or author, and so a document that is beyond the main stage of authorial composition” (2007: 195).

2. Finding a copy today is equally hard. WorldCat lists only fourteen libraries in the world where it can be found. While Amazon.com lists the work, it has an “unknown” binding and publisher, and it is out of print.

3. John Astington has recently calculated that from the end of the 1500s to the early 1600s, the total number of London-based actors, shareholders, hired men, and boys, amounted to only about 150-200 people (2010: 8-9).

4. This is a modification of her own conclusion in 2001, when she argued that Nashe “is by far the stronger suspect, at least as far as the ‘Upstart Crow’ passage is concerned,” in part because Nashe was “already well experienced in writing satirical and controversial pamphlets carefully concealed under pseudonyms” (2001: 44). She confirmed her new position to me in a personal conversation at the SEDERI conference in Seville in 2012.

5. The *Oxford Companion to Shakespeare* repeated the same claim, almost word-for-word in 2002 (80). In the same year, however, Brian Vickers disputed this notion: In the years between 1570 and 1650, Vickers counted 497 plays published with acknowledgment of single authorship, versus 32 plays with some acknowledgment of collaboration—a ratio of about 15-1 (Vickers, 2002: 17).

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