CHAPTER 8

Did Shakespeare have a literary career?

Patrick Cheney

Among the authors addressed in this volume, William Shakespeare is something of a special case: he alone is thought to lack a 'literary career'. Unlike Virgil and Horace, or Petrarch and Boccaccio, or Milton and Dryden, Shakespeare is thought to have a 'professional career': he is a man of the theatre, a jobbing playwright, a consummate actor and a savvy shareholder of an acting company, too preoccupied with the daily business of his new commercial enterprise to take an interest in the literary goals of English authorship.[1] Only during the past few years, however, have we detached ourselves enough from this twentieth-century classification to recognize it as a classification, a critical construction of 'Shakespeare' born out of specific temporal origins, with its own location in history. That history, we shall see, is less Shakespeare's than our own. Even so, we need to begin with it because so many critics continue to subscribe to it. Indeed, during the past century many were intent to announce this classification as a seminal achievement, and we may single out two primary movements that coalesced to create it.

The first is *theatrical*, which Harry Levin summarizes in an important 1986 essay: 'Our century has restored our perception of him to his genre, the drama, enhanced by increasing historical knowledge alongside the live tradition of the performing arts.'[2] Levin is reacting to the Restoration, Augustan, Romantic and Victorian reduction of Shakespeare's theatrical art to what John Dryden called in 1668 'Dramatick Poesie'.[3] If critics from the late seventeenth century through the nineteenth tended to read Shakespearean drama as poetry, critics in the twentieth century succeeded in detaching the drama from poetry, viewing it largely as theatre. The flagship for this theatrical project continues to be the 1986 *Oxford Shakespeare*, the goal of which is to produce a Shakespearean text as it was originally *performed*.[4] In 1997, *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition* institutionalized this theatrical classification for the American academy, with Stephen Greenblatt presenting 'Shakespeare' as 'the working dramatist'.[5]

The second movement is *materialist*, which we have anticipated by mentioning Greenblatt. In origin, this movement is post-structuralist, indebted to Roland Barthes's work on 'the death of the author' and Michel Foucault's on the 'author function'.[6] The general goal has been to challenge traditional notions of the autonomous author by seeing literary work produced through cultural institutions. In Renaissance dramatic circles, the playwright emerged not as an *intending* author who wrote masterpieces of literature for all time but as a *bending* collaborator in a complex cultural process that includes businessmen, actors, printers and so forth.[7]

As recently as 2001, David Scott Kastan can indicate the complicity of the materialist with the theatrical movement: 'At least in his role as playwright, Shakespeare had no obvious interest in the printed book. Performance was the only form of publication he sought for his plays. He made no effort to have them published.'[8] According to Kastan, for a critic to work on the 'book' of Shakespeare means to *decentre* the individuated literary author and foreground the process of theatrical collaboration. The coalescence of the theatrical and materialist movements was popularly rehearsed in the 1998 Academy Award-winning film, *Shakespeare in Love*, when a new financial sponsor asks the owner of the Rose Theatre, Philip Henslowe, 'Who's that?', pointing to a young Shakespeare. 'No one', Henslowe remarks. 'He's the author.'[9]

During the past few years, however, a backlash has set in, and several critics have challenged the man-of-the-theatre model as simplistic and anachronistic. Most importantly, in 2003 Lukas Erne published *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*, arguing that Shakespeare became a dramatic author during his own lifetime. Whereas most recent bibliographical work joins the *Oxford Shakespeare* in producing a Shakespearean text that editors believe was performed, Erne uses bibliography to show that Shakespeare and his acting company produced playtexts for *both* performance *and* publication. As Erne himself puts it, 'Printed playbooks became respectable reading matter earlier than we have hitherto supposed, early enough for Shakespeare to have lived through and to have been affected by this process of legitimation … The assumption of Shakespeare's indifference to the publication of his plays is a myth.'[10]

---

[1] Bentley 1971; P. Thomson 1992. As we shall see, Helgerson 1983 is the bridge between Bentley and Thomson, classifying Shakespeare as a 'professional' rather than either a 'laureate' or an 'amateur'.

[2] Levin 1986: 228.

[3] Vickers 1974–81: i. 136.

[4] Wells, Taylor, Jowett and Montgomery 1986: xxxvi.

[5] Greenblatt, Cohen, Howard and Maus 1997: 1.

[6] Barthes 1977; Foucault 1998.

[7] See Orgel 1991; De Grazia and Stallybrass 1993; Masten 1997.

[8] Kastan 2001: 5–6.

[9] *Shakespeare in Love*, directed by John Madden, written by Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard (Miramax Home Entertainment, 1998). See Wall 2006: 1.

Within the past five years, enough criticism has emerged to allow Catherine Belsey to speak of 'a quiet revolution in Shakespeare studies': 'More than two decades after New Historicism turned our attention away from close reading and toward locating Shakespeare more firmly in his own culture, scholarship is shifting our focus onto Shakespeare's own place in that culture itself, and the case is founded firmly on the texts.'[11] In addition to Erne, Belsey cites James P. Bednarz's 2001 *Shakespeare and the Poets' War*, which shows Shakespeare to be a deeply self-conscious dramatist using the stage between 1599 and 1601 to challenge Jonson's self-proclaimed authority as an English author; and my own 2004 *Shakespeare, National Poet-Playwright*, which responds to Erne (and Bednarz) by reclassifying Shakespeare as a *literary poet-playwright*, the author of both poems and plays.[12]

Since 2005, the 'quiet revolution' has become louder. Not simply has Erne written a number of follow-up essays, but considerable bibliographical support has emerged.[13] For example, Stanley Wells has examined the unpublished manuscript of William Scott, *The Model of Poesy* (1599–1601), to document the way in which a Shakespearean play, *Richard II*, was *read*, by a contemporary, in quarto form alongside his published poem, *The Rape of Lucrece*, for verse style.[14] Additionally, M. P. Jackson has argued that Shakespeare created the figure of the Rival Poet in the *Sonnets* in response to Francis Meres' 1598 portrait of him in *Palladis Tamia*, by drawing on bits of Meres' discourse about Marlowe, Chapman, Jonson, Drayton and even Spenser.[15] Finally, Alan Nelson has surveyed book owners of Shakespeare's poems and plays before 1616 to 'conclude, against the grain of much modern criticism, that Shakespeare's poems and plays ought to be approached, if we are to respect history, not as documents of politics, theology, religious controversy, philosophy, or anthropology, but as "poesy": that is to say, as objects of delight, as verbal and dramatic art, as – dare I think it? – English Literature.'[16]

---

[10] Erne 2003: 25–6. Erne traces his project to Berger 1989 and Peters 2000.

[11] Belsey 2006: 170. [12] Bednarz 2001. [13] Erne 2006, 2007 and 2008.

[14] Wells 2008. [15] Jackson 2006. [16] Nelson 2005: 70.

In addition to bibliographers, literary critics have looked at Shakespeare's poems and plays to find evidence of Shakespeare's standing as a literary poet-playwright: not simply my own 2008 *Shakespeare's Literary Authorship* but Charlotte Scott's 2007 *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Book* – two monographs that try to break apart the binary thinking that sees Shakespeare as a man of the theatre opposed to print culture.[17] Finally, two 2008 collections support this project: *Shakespeare's Book*, edited by Richard Meek, Jane Rickard and Richard Wilson, which forms 'part of a new phase in Shakespeare studies' by challenging the man-of-the-theatre model with that of 'a literary "poet-playwright", concerned with his readers as well as his audiences' (jacket cover); and *Shakespeare and Spenser: Attractive Opposites*, edited by J. B. Lethbridge, which demonstrates that 'Shakespeare read Spenser, remembered what he read and put it to good use.'[18]

With such recent work now available, perhaps the question, 'Did Shakespeare have a literary career?', acquires new urgency. When we look into this question, however, we confront an immediate paradox: theorists of literary careers have viewed Shakespeare as the arch-theatrical man who foregoes print. As a result, we do not merely lack a study of Shakespeare's literary career; we have absented this author from the felicity of a literary career altogether.

In this chapter, I would thus like to look further into the topic of Shakespeare's 'career', with particular reference to its Classical underpinnings.[19] In the first section below, I review our main critical models for a literary career to discover a template against which to answer the title question, including Virgilian and Ovidian intertextuality as mediated by Spenser and Marlowe, respectively. In the second section, I summarize the evidence of Shakespeare's poems and plays as it maps onto this template, focusing on a single example: the Choruses to the mid-career history play *Henry V*, replete with a well-known 'epic' presentment. In a concluding section, I suggest not that Shakespeare lacked a literary career but that *we* lack a lexicon for classifying it. If we are to map Shakespearean authorship historically, perhaps we need a more empirically grounded idea of a literary career than has yet been developed. Although the following account cannot sufficiently map such terrain in its limited space, some preliminary work might open up areas for further research.

---

[17] Scott 2007; Cheney 2008a. [18] Lethbridge 2008: 52.

[19] On Shakespeare's Classicism see, for example, J. Bate 1993 and H. James 1997. Also invaluable are P. Hardie 2002a; Martindale and Martindale 1990; Martindale 2004b.

CRITICAL MODELS OF A LITERARY CAREER

The two inventors of criticism on 'literary careers' have little to say about Shakespeare. In his 1981 *Life of the Poet: Beginning and Ending Poetic Careers*, Lawrence Lipking includes only a unit on Ben Jonson's memorial poem to Shakespeare from the 1623 First Folio. Lipking may exclude Shakespeare because his book examines 'poetic careers' – the careers of 'great poets' writing poems, not playwrights writing plays.[20] If so, we indeed run into a deep structural problem: Shakespeare's practice as a playwright in the newly marketed theatre is simply too messy to allow for a literary career.

Lipking's model is nonetheless important. His book is 'about the life of the poet: poetic vocations, poetic careers, poetic destinies ... By listening carefully both to what poets say about their works and to what works say about themselves, it hopes to arrive at a clearer understanding of the way that a poem can constitute the experience of a life' (ix). Accordingly, Lipking organizes his study around 'Three points' in the poet's life: 'the moment of initiation or breakthrough; the moment of summing up; and the moment of passage, when the legacy or soul of the poet's work is transmitted to the next generation' (ix). Lipking's method, then, is to read the 'poems' of 'great poets' for their self-reflexive sense of vocation or destiny, their idea of a literary career.

If Lipking emphasizes a great poet's *self-discovery*, the other pathfinding book on literary careers, Richard Helgerson's 1983 *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton, and the Literary System*, emphasizes the poet's *self-presentation*.[21] Helgerson proposes a three-part classification for Renaissance writers: laureates, amateurs and professionals. Laureates are the national writers, such as Spenser, Jonson and Milton, who write serious literature throughout their adult lives to serve both the state and eternity (8). Like Lipking (1981: xi, 69, 76–80), Helgerson discusses (but does not emphasize) the Classical underpinnings of an English Renaissance literary career, since Spenser selects Virgil as his primary model; Jonson, Horace; and Milton, Homer (Helgerson 1983: 1). According to Helgerson, 'the something of great constancy at the centre of the laureate's work is ... the poet himself' (40): 'His laureate function requires that he speak from the centre' (12). In contrast, amateur poets, such as Philip Sidney, write poetry during their youth, see their art as a pastime, and do not publish their work. The professionals are primarily public playwrights, like Marlowe, who write to make a living.

Helgerson briefly classifies Shakespeare as a 'professional' writer who 'made ... [his] living from the public theater' (Helgerson 1983: 4–5). In contrast, Spenser is Renaissance England's first 'laureate' (100), because this print-author uses strategies of *self-crowning* to present himself as a poet who will shape national destiny.[22] As Helgerson deftly puts it, 'Shakespeare [as an author] is simply not there. The laureates are' (10). Helgerson's distinction between *the laureate Spenser who is there* and *the professional Shakespeare who is not* continues to inform criticism today. In fact, this distinction updates one of the longest held commonplaces in Shakespeare studies, tracing most famously to John Keats's model of 'Negative Capability', and articulated well by Alvin Kernan in 1995: 'Shakespeare was not an autobiographical poet, at least not in any simple, direct sense. Anything but. He remains, in fact, the most anonymous of our great writers – we seem always to glimpse only the back of his head just as he slips around the corner.'[23] This commonplace is so entrenched that it becomes a recurrent feature of Greenblatt's 2004 biography, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*: 'Shakespeare was a master of double consciousness ... [H]e contrived ... to hide himself from view ... [he had an] astonishing capacity to be everywhere and nowhere, to assume all positions and to slip free of all constraints.'[24]

Thus, Helgerson and Lipking may bypass Shakespeare because he does not conform to the gold standard for a literary career that they share; this standard is based on *authorial agency*. In his 1996 *Big-Time Shakespeare*, Michael Bristol does accommodate the gold standard to Shakespeare, yet helps us to understand the problem: 'It is not clear ... whether William Shakespeare did or did not aspire to the status of author [as established by Spenser and Jonson] ... [W]e [simply] don't know what we need to know about Shakespeare as an author.'[25] Bristol's formulation helps explain why Wendy Wall, in her 2000 overview essay, 'Authorship and the Material Conditions of Writing', foregrounds the laureate achievements of Spenser and Jonson yet mentions Shakespeare only once in passing: 'When Spenser and Jonson used the book format to generate the author's laureate status, ... they produced ... modern and familiar images of literary authority – classically authorized writers who serve as the origin and arbiter of a literary monument that exceeds its place in everyday cultural transactions.'[26] Effectively, Shakespeare has been written out of our narrative about the invention of English laureate authorship, and thus the idea of a literary career.

---

[20] Lipking 1981: ix.

[21] As Helgerson himself puts the difference: 'where I direct my attention to the outer works of both careers and texts – that is, to the system of differences by which a poet might make his status known – Lipking directs his to the inner development of both' (Helgerson 1983: 153).

[22] Criticism on careers has grown up around Spenser, foregrounded in Helgerson 1983, ch.1: see Rambuss 1993 and Cheney 1993. On 'career criticism', see Cheney 2002a.

[23] Kernan 1995: 179. For Keats's 'Negative Capability' see Cook 1990: 370.

[24] Greenblatt 2004: 155. [25] Bristol 1996: 57.

Let us see if we can summarize why. To have a 'literary career', a writer needs to aspire to the status of author, in the canonical literary tradition of authorship growing out of Virgil and other classical authors, in open competition with authors in his own literary system, via a generically patterned set of traditional works that rely on visible strategies of both self-presentation and self-discovery, in order to achieve the twin goals of national service and literary immortality. While this definition may be cumbersome, it has the advantage of bringing together six concepts that form a *career-template*: *authorship, intertextuality, genre, self-crowning consciousness, nationalism, fame.* Together, these concepts (I suggest) form the foundation of an early modern author's literary career as we understand it today.

For most critics, Shakespeare gets himself into hot water quickly in terms of the career-template. For we do not know what we need to know about Shakespeare's aspiration to be an author. We cannot find the sustained quotation of Classical authors that we expect of someone who aspires to be an author. Nor does this professional write in the genres expected of a literary career, especially Virgilian pastoral and epic. In the plays and poems he writes, he notoriously fails to present himself, and thus to represent his self-discovery. Consequently, we cannot determine the pedigree of his politics in relation to the nation, or discover a concern with a literary afterlife.

Yet those who resist this author's agency by relying on the revisionist principle of 'social construction' forget that we have moved into a post-revisionist era. Since the mid-1990s, many leading Renaissance critics have been articulating a model of authorship that allows for both social construction and individual agency. The leading voice is that of Louis Montrose, who offers a thrilling indictment of Foucault:

> Foucault's own anti-humanist project is to anatomize the subject's subjection to the disciplinary discourses of power. I find this aspect of Foucault's social vision – his apparent occlusion of a space for human agency – to be extreme. In other words, my intellectual response is that his argument is unconvincing, and my visceral response is that it is intolerable.[27]

In responding to Foucault, however, Montrose does not 'seek to restore to the individual the illusory power of self-creation'; nor does he 'wish to remystify the social production of the text, to reassert its status as an expression of the autonomous author's singular creative genius': 'Any meaningful response to Foucault's provocative concept of the "author function" will commence, not by rejecting it, but rather by expanding and refining it, by giving greater historical and cultural specificity and variability both to the notion of Author and to the possible functions it may serve' (Montrose 1996: 92). More succinctly, Helgerson has said in his 1992 *Forms of Nationhood*, when discussing the topic of Shakespeare's authorial agency, 'he helped make the world that made him'.[28]

Among leading Shakespeareans, it is Bristol who has looked into Shakespeare's authorship and career in most detail, and he outlines a post-revisionist model:

> Authorship need not be understood as a sovereign and proprietary relationship to specific utterances. It is perhaps more fully theorized in terms of dialogue and ethical sponsorship. The author is both debtor and trustee of meaning rather than sole proprietor; authority is always ministerial rather than magisterial.[29]

Bristol acknowledges Shakespeare's intentions as an author within a collaborative culture, and sees him working intertextually with other authors: 'Shakespeare labored in his vocation at the selection, composition, and verbal articulation of scripts intended for production in the theater ... He was in continual dialogue with other writers, including both his literary sources and his immediate contemporaries.' Consequently, Bristol interprets 'Shakespeare's vocation' both 'as the practice of a craft and as the production of a commodity in the context of a nascent show business' (Bristol 1996: 58).

In this pre-Ernean account, Bristol aims to correct the emphasis on collaboration, which minimizes individuation, to allow the author's agency to accrue force. His word 'vocation' replaces the more traditional word, 'profession', used by Bentley, Helgerson and Thomson.[30] Bristol's post-revisionist model of Shakespeare's authorial vocation, anticipating Erne's 'literary dramatist', prepares us to take up the question of whether

---

[26] Wall 2000: 83, 86; on Shakespeare, with reference to the First Folio, see p. 83.

[27] Montrose 1996: 92. [28] Helgerson 1992: 215. [29] Bristol 1996: 58.

[30] Bristol prefers *vocation* over *profession*, because of 'its fundamentally religious sense of active commitment to the values of a particular craft' (Bristol 1996: 55).

Shakespeare might be an author with an *enigmatic* literary career – so enigmatic we have yet to chart it.

'OUR BENDING AUTHOR': SHAKESPEARE'S COUNTER-LAUREATE CAREER

Once we try to chart it, we discover not simply how different Shakespeare's writing practice seems from the laureates but finally how deeply embedded it is in the laureate craft. For instance, Spenser tells fictions *directly* about the literary career of the author, but, according to the received wisdom, Shakespeare does not. Here is E.K.'s gloss on Colin Clout in the *Januarye* eclogue from *The Shepheardes Calender*: 'Under which name this Poete secretly shadoweth himself, as sometime did Virgil under the name of Tityrus.'[31] In contrast, we are told, Shakespeare tells fictions about *characters* such as Falstaff and Hamlet.[32] If, as Lipking says, 'to teach us how to see him, the poet must first project himself into his work' (Lipking 1981: ix), we face stern – or perhaps playful – resistance from William Shakespeare. In *Timon of Athens*, the tragic hero precisely ridicules a figure named The Poet for 'Stand[ing] for a villain in [his] ... own work': 'Wilt thou', Timon adds, 'whip thine own faults in other men?'[33]

Yet, as the case of The Poet in *Timon* intimates, Shakespeare turns out to possess knowledge of, and control over, the western idea of a literary career, as we have defined it in our template. For instance, even though we cannot find a recurrent, recognizable persona like Colin Clout in the Shakespeare canon, critics have repeatedly made cases for cameo appearances of the author in his plays, with the three 'William' characters the most formalized, since they gesture to the author's own name, as identified in Sonnet 136 ('my name is *Will*' ([14]): William of Windsor in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*; William of Arden in *As You Like It*; and Williams of England in *Henry V*.[34] Moreover, by looking in on each of the six concepts in our template, we may see that Shakespeare is historic precisely for putting the idea of a literary career centre-stage, and in doing so for *countering* the notion of a *laureate career*, especially as the Classically oriented Spenser and Jonson define it for their contemporaries: Shakespeare invents a *counter-laureate authorship*, and thus a *counter-laureate career*.[35]

Shakespeare's counter-laureate career is on display throughout his poems and plays, but here we need to let a single example 'St[and] for the whole to be imagined' (*Rape of Lucrece* 1428) – in particular, the visible (and detailed) *meta-theatre* of the six-piece sequence in *Henry V*, which consists of a Prologue, four Choruses and an Epilogue. Critics have discussed these bits of metatheatre a good deal, but have tended to focus on their authorship (the consensus is that Shakespeare wrote them), on their uniformity with the plot of the play, and especially on the relation expressed between actor and audience, with Shakespeare assigning remarkable authority to the audience in the working of theatre: 'eche out our performance with your mind' (Chorus 3.35).[36] Thus far, however, no one has looked at the Choruses as 'career documents' – moments inside Shakespeare's plays that reflect on his 'literary career'.

Shakespeare's plays contain twenty-eight such documents, although eleven (from *Pericles*, *Henry VIII* and *Two Noble Kinsmen*) may not be by him. That still leaves seventeen, from the two-scene Induction of *The Taming of the Shrew* to the Epilogue from *The Tempest*. To these, we may add the two *Dedicatory Epistles* to *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594), as well as the *Dedicatory Epistle* to *Troilus and Cressida*, which may (or may not) be by Shakespeare.[37] These meta-documents demonstrate that, contrary to popular opinion, Shakespeare does *present himself*.

In particular, he joins the laureates in presenting his *authorship*, as the opening to the Epilogue to *Henry V* makes clear:

> Thus far, with rough and all-unable pen,
> Our bending author hath pursu'd the story.
> *Henry V*, Epilogue 1–2

Throughout his canon, Shakespeare uses the word 'author' twenty-four times; fully half of them refer to the author as a writer. As Katherine Duncan-Jones suggests, the phrase 'Our bending author' has two meanings, especially if Shakespeare performed the part of the Chorus himself, as critics believe: 1) the author bends over his desk working with pen, ink and paper; 2) the author-actor 'bends' in genuflection before his audience. She adds 'a further point', that 'our bending author' identifies the play as 'the work of a single writer only' (K. Duncan-Jones 2001: 112), and, equally important here, she sees the phrase evoking the Keatsian principle of Negative Capability, the ability of this author to *rise by bending* (107): 'Shakespeare draws attention to his sole authorship so unobtrusively and tactfully that modern readers ... may not even notice that anything unusual is being claimed' (112). In this way, the Chorus uses a single phrase to mark the signature of Shakespearean counter-authorship as we understand it today.

---

[31] Spenser quotations come from Spenser 1909–10 (ed. Smith and de Selincourt). The i–j, u–v, and other early modern typographical conventions, such as the italicizing of names and places, have been silently modernized from all early modern texts.

[32] Bloom 1998 is vocal about the historic significance of Shakespearean 'character'.

[33] *Timon of Athens* 5.1.37–9, in Evans and Tobin 1997. All Shakespeare quotations come from this edition.

[34] On William of Arden, see Bednarz 2001: 117–29. On William of Windsor, see J. Bate 1997: 8, 13. And on Williams of England, see Patterson 1989: 88–92.

[35] This is the topic of Cheney 2004 and 2008a.

[36] For these issues, see Taylor 1982; Gurr 1992a; Craik 1995. For recent criticism, see Baldo 2008; Kezar 2001: 176–95; Weimann 1988.

[37] On the possibility of Shakespeare's co-authorship, see K. Duncan-Jones 2001: 219–22.

The bending author's word 'Our' draws attention to a feature of Shakespeare's authorship much commented on: he *communalizes* the agency of the 'author', drawing himself into the community of the theatre, which rehearses a dialogue between actors and audience. The word 'pen' recalls the author's material instrument, which Shakespeare had recently featured in the coat of arms drawn up for his family: a spear in the shape of a pen.[38] The word 'pursu'd' draws attention to the author's *agency*, while 'story' makes sure we do not mistake his *Life of Henry the Fifth* for mere 'history'; rather, it is a work of historical fiction. Finally, the phrase 'rough and all-unable' not only deploys the author's modesty topos but transposes the laureate self-presentation of Spenser to the stage. For, in the *June* eclogue Colin Clout tells his friend Hobinoll, 'I wote my rymes bene rough, and rudely drest' (77). Spenser's use of 'rough' introduces a Virgilian provenance to the Chorus' utterance: the Shakespearean author presents himself unobtrusively as a pastoral poet. In sum, this inept (pastoral) author, in the raw of nature, works hard at the refined art of literary courtesy.

He works so hard that he makes the opening two lines of the Epilogue the beginning of a Shakespearean sonnet, as scholars have long realized.[39] The presence of an inset sonnet within a Shakespearean play, familiar from *Romeo and Juliet* and elsewhere, speaks deftly – one wants to say, invisibly – to this author's standing as a national poet-playwright. More to the point: the man of the theatre presents himself as a literary poet-playwright, an author with a dramatic career, combining plays with poems, following the lead of Marlowe, and, before him, Ovid.[40]

---

[38] For details, see Cheney 2008a: 34–7.

[39] See, for example, Walter 1954: 156.

[40] Cheney 2004: 17–73.

The opening two lines to the Prologue of *Henry V* also *self-present* Shakespeare's theatrical authorship:

> O for a Muse of fire that would ascend
> The brightest heaven of invention!
> *Henry V*, Prologue 1–2

This utterance is oblique, so much so that the Victorians chose to perform it as a 'Pre-Raphaelite sigh' uttered by a female,[41] yet it feels masculine enough, and anything but a sigh. Rather, it is an exclamation, voicing a resounding literary possibility: that an author ('a Muse of fire') could use his inspired (female) imagination to 'invent' a work so powerful it participates in the divine ('ascend / The brightest heaven'). The Christian resonance of 'ascend' and 'heaven', together with the imagery of light ('fire', 'brightest'), makes this author's Classical invocation to the Muse not a mere convention but a semi-religious ritual. In the *October* eclogue, Spenser had used the topos to describe the literary fame of 'the Romish Tityrus', Virgil, whose three-part career – 'Oaten reede', 'laboured lands' and 'warres' – affects the divine: 'So as the Heavens did quake his verse to here' (55–60). Like Spenser's Virgilian career-poetics, Shakespeare's poetic metatheatre has a metaphysical dimension to it; yet, rather than invoke the Muse for inspiration, this author vaunts the telos of his own renown.

In particular, Shakespeare's Classical reference to the Muse presents his play as an English national epic in the tradition of Homer and Virgil. Thus, Shakespearean authorship operates through intertextuality, and intertextuality itself is the singular marker of authorship. In his Oxford edition of the play, Gary Taylor glosses the opening two lines of the Prologue as 'a collocation of phrases in Chapman's *Achilles' Shield* (1598): "his ascential muse" (Dedication, l. 117), and "Bright-footed Thetis did the sphere aspire / (Amongst th'immortals) of the God of fire" (ll. 1–2)'.[42] In his introduction, Taylor takes the eighteenth-century cue of George Steevens, who first cited Chapman's 1598 *Seven Books of the Iliad* as a source-text: 'though Shakespeare is known to have read Chapman's translation some time between its publication in 1598 and the composition of *Troilus and Cressida* (*c.* 1602), the possibility of Chapman's influence on *Henry V* has never been followed up. This is surprising, since Shakespeare clearly encourages comparison of Henry with his classical counterparts' (Taylor 1982: 52). For Taylor (as for many), the Classical matrix 'elevate[s] … *Henry V* to the status of "epic"' (58), in part because, like the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the play is 'a study in human greatness' (72) – a 'greatness', Taylor 'believe[s]', that 'Shakespeare, in 1599, was aware of', especially with respect to 'his own success', 'his achievement and potential as an artist' (73).

---

[41] Taylor 1982: 56.

[42] Taylor 1982: 91.

In Shakespeare's hands, the intertextuality by which his Classical English counter-authorship proceeds foregrounds 'consciousness'.[43] Thus, the Choruses of *Henry V* script a dramatic poetics linking 'author' with actor and audience by featuring the power all three share, imagination:

> And let us, ciphers to this great accompt,
> On your imaginary forces work.
> …
> Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts;
> Into a thousand parts divide one man,
> And make imaginary puissance.
> *Henry V*, Prologue 17–25

The effect of linking author, actor and audience is to highlight the cultural 'work' of the literary imagination that theatre performs. As such, the Choruses show the author engaging in the process of self-discovery outlined by Lipking. I propose that the Choruses constitute a historic 'summing-up' of Shakespearean art at the midpoint of his career. According to Lipking, this middle phase can 'take many forms', but the one he discusses first is relevant to *Henry V*: 'an epic could conclude a career' (Lipking 1981: 68). *Henry V* is not the epic crowning Shakespeare's career, but criticism has long argued that in this play, as in the Henriad as a whole, the author puts the genre of national epic on the stage.[44]

What has escaped notice is Shakespeare's use of a Classical topos for the generic shape to a literary career, 'to compare great things with small', which John S. Coolidge identifies as a Virgilian strategy for representing the progression from pastoral to georgic to epic: 'To signalize this progression Virgil makes special use of the familiar phrase, "to compare great things with small" … Thus the idle shepherd carries the implicit promise of … the strenuous hero, to come; and the lowly pastoral kind looks forwards towards the epic.'[45] For Virgil, pastoral contains or compresses epic in order to predict it. As Coolidge shows, writers from Lucretius to Milton rely on the topos, including Ovid, who uses it several times, in part to counter the Virgilian progressive model with one featuring his oscillation

---

[43] On this concept, see Cheney 2008a: 203–33, especially 205 n. 8 for a history of criticism.

[44] See Cheney 2008a: 31–62. [45] Coolidge 1965: 2, 11.

through the genres of erotic elegy, tragedy and epic.[46] In Elizabethan culture, Marlowe and Spenser both use the career topos to play out the opposition between an Ovidian and a Virgilian career model: Spenser, in Cuddie's Emblem concluding *October*; Marlowe, in his translation of *Amores* 2.17.4.

In the Choruses to *Henry V*, Shakespeare deploys the career topos three times, and in each he applies it to his theatrical poetics, as his phrasing in the third example formalizes: 'in that small most greatly lived / This star of England' (Epilogue 5–6). First, in the Prologue, the bending author addresses the audience directly:

> O, pardon! since a crooked figure may
> Attest in little place a million.
> *Henry V*, Prologue 15–16

Typically, editors unravel the mathematics: 'a zero, in the unit's place, transforms 100,000 into 1,000,000 … The same point is made in George Peele's *Edward I*'.[47] I suggest, rather, that Shakespeare has his eye on another Elizabethan dramatist, whom critics identify as his greatest rival, including in *Henry V*: Christopher Marlowe.[48] For, Shakespeare's formulation, in which a single actor ('crooked figure') may represent ('attest') 'in little place a million', rewrites one of Marlowe's most famous lines: 'Infinite riches in a little room.'[49]

In *The Jew of Malta*, Barabas refers to the wealth in his counting-house, yet, as the actor gestures with his arms, the 'little room' becomes the theatre, and the 'infinite riches' the wealth of the theatre itself. Chapman may have been the first to hint at this meaning, when he writes of Ovid seeing Corinna/Julia in *Ovid's Banquet of Sense* (1595):

> He saw th' extraction of all fairest dames:
> The fair of beauty, as whole countries come
> And show their riches in a little room.[50]

Shakespeare had himself rewritten the Marlovian line in *As You Like It*, when Touchstone refers to 'a great reckoning in a little room' (3.3.12–15) – an 'allusion to Christopher Marlowe's death at the hands of Ingram Frizer in 1593 in a quarrel over a tavern bill'.[51] In particular, the *Henry V* Chorus may gesture to the Marlovian 'reckoning' in the term 'accompt', meaning 'reckoning' (Evans and Tobin 1997: 979). If so, Shakespeare credits Marlowe with voicing the theatrical strategy evoked in the Choruses: the communal ability of author, actor and audience to make 'infinite' with 'little', 'great' with 'small'.[52]

---

[46] For details, see Cheney 1997: 63 and 286 n. 30. [47] Taylor 1982: 92.

[48] See Shapiro 1991; J. Bate 1997: 101–32. On the Tamburlainian underpinnings of *Henry V*, see Logan 2007: 143–68.

[49] *Jew of Malta* 1.1.32. Quotations from Marlowe's plays come from Burnett 1999.

[50] Chapman, *Ovid's Banquet of Sense*, in Shepherd 1911–24: ii.29.

[51] Evans and Tobin 1997: 421.

Second, to open Act 2, the Chorus says,

> O England! model to thy inward greatness,
> Like little body with a mighty heart.
> *Henry V*, Chorus 2.16–17

Here, Shakespeare extends the career topos to the communal performance of nationhood, as the word 'model' indicates. England is a 'model' (or 'small-scale replica')[53] of its 'inward greatness'; or perhaps it is a 'mould' of that greatness,[54] the way a small body contains a big heart. Like theatre, the nation is a small thing containing 'inner greatness'.

In keeping with the generic dynamic operating in the 'great things in small' formula, the second Chorus is important because it begins with displaced versions of both the Ovidian and Virgilian career models:

> Now all the youth of England are on fire,
> And silken dalliance in the wardrobe lies;
> Now thrive the armorers, and honor's thought
> Reigns solely in the breast of every man.
> Then sell the pasture now to buy the horse,
> Following the mirror of all Christian kings,
> With winged heels, as English Mercuries.
> *Henry V*, Chorus 2.1–7

Here, Shakespeare transposes the authorial 'Muse of fire' from the first Chorus to the *character* of the 'youth of England', who 'are on fire' – inspired with the author's epic ambition. Thus they have left their 'silken dalliance' in the 'wardrobe' and donned manly 'armor', reversing the trajectory of Ovid in the *Amores*, when he turns from 'stern war' to 'amorous lays'.[55] Like Virgil, the Chorus presents the English youth moving from the domain of pastoral to that of epic, when they 'sell the pasture' to 'buy the horse'. The reference to 'winged' Mercury confirms this metapoetic reading, for Mercury is not simply the messenger god but the god of poets, as Michael Drayton knew when he used Mercury's hat on his coat of arms to exhibit his laureate status.[56]

---

[52] The editions of Walter 1954, Taylor 1982, Craik 1995 and Gurr 1992a do not gloss the lines with Marlowe.

[53] Taylor 1982: 118.

[54] Craik 1995: 153.

[55] Ovid, *Amores* 1.1.32–3, trans. Christopher Marlowe, in Cheney and Striar 2006.

The Epilogue uses the Marlovian topos a third time, right where we should expect it:

> Thus far, with rough and all-unable pen,
> Our bending author hath pursu'd the story,
> In little room confining mighty men,
> Mangling by starts the full course of their glory.
> Small time; but in that small most greatly lived
> This star of England.
> *Henry V*, Epilogue 1–6

Here Shakespeare defines the essence of his counter-authorial poetics, the stage means by which the 'bending author … pursu[es] the story': he confines 'mighty men' in a 'little room', 'misrepresenting their glorious series of achievements through the fragmentary nature of this play'.[57] Again, Shakespeare acknowledges the limitation of theatre while highlighting the Mercurial leap of imagination – both his own and that of actor and audience – which makes theatre work. Then he locates the career topos in the hero of the epic history, King Henry, who lived but a 'Small time' but nonetheless who concentrates greatness: 'but in that small most greatly lived'. In sum, Shakespeare rewrites the career topos to highlight not the author alone but the link between author, actor, nation and national hero.

The phrase 'the full course of their glory' warrants pause here. Taylor glosses 'course' as meaning four things: '(a) gallop on horseback (b) military encounter (c) hunt, pursuit of game (d) sequence, narrative' (Taylor 1982: 281). The fourth meaning is especially to the point, for the metapoetic word 'course' can also refer to the 'narrative' or 'story', even as it gestures to the original meaning of *career*, 'Of a horse: a Short gallop at full speed' (*OED*, Def. 2), 'By extension: A running course' (Def. 3). The sixteenth-century definition of 'career' derives from the Latin word *cursus*, the course of a chariot-race, used by Ovid and Virgil to represent their progress as poets. For instance, Ovid ends the *Amores* by announcing the conclusion to his poem: 'This last end [= turning-post] to my Elegies is set' (3.15.2). Similarly, Virgil opens Book 3 of the *Georgics* by imagining himself entering Rome in triumph to greet Caesar: 'In his honour I, a victor resplendent in Tyrian purple, will drive a hundred four-horse chariots beside the stream.'[58] As Leo Braudy writes in *The Frenzy of Renown*, 'Although the Latin *cursus* remains most obviously in the English course, it shares a more intriguing metaphorical relation with *career*: Both are words that first applied to horse races and later to the stages of professional development.'[59]

---

[56] Craik 1995: 152 and Cheney 2008a: 34–7, including scholarship on Mercury as a poet-figure.

[57] Craik 1995: 370.

Significantly, Shakespeare uses the word that is Braudy's great subject: 'glory' – authorial fame, as the sonnet-rhyme with 'story' intimates. Indeed, the 'story' of Henry V is about 'glory', as the king himself announces: 'I will rise there with so full a glory / That I will dazzle all the eyes of France' (1.2.278–9). Pistol parodies Henry's project after the king urges his men, 'Once more unto the breach' (3.1.1), for the Ancient lapses into mock-frenzy of 'plain-song' (3.2.7):

> ... God's vassals drop and die,
> And sword and shield,
> In bloody field,
> Doth win immortal fame.
> *Henry V* 3.2.8–11

Long ago, William Hazlitt noted, 'It has been much disputed whether Shakspeare was actuated by the love of fame', but he himself goes on to dissent. Milton, Spenser, Bacon, Chaucer, Dante and others sought fame, 'But it is not so in Shakspeare': 'There is scarcely the slightest trace of any such feeling in his writings ... And this indifference may be accounted for from the very circumstance, that he was almost entirely a man of genius', not a man of 'taste'.[60] The idea is still current, for in 1992 Andrew Gurr says of Shakespeare and fellow dramatists, 'Except for a few poets, nobody gave a thought to posterity.'[61]

Yet Erne has reminded us of the historical context for viewing 'literary fame' at this time: 'Toward the end of the sixteenth century, an English poet's hopes that his verse would live on after his death were probably more likely to come true than ever before', because of the steady emergence of printed books (Erne 2003: 6–7). Erne cites J. B. Leishman, who in 1961 challenged the notion that Shakespeare took no interest in the afterlife of his plays: Shakespeare, 'who is commonly supposed to have been indifferent to literary fame, ... has written both more copiously and more memorably on this topic than any other sonneteer'.[62] Erne's conclusion, that 'Shakespeare's dramatic writing ... does suggest a fair amount of artistic ambition and self-consciousness' (2003: 5), can be amply supported. For starters, Shakespeare uses the word 'fame' and its cognates nearly 200 times; the word 'renown' and its cognates, over 50 more; and the word 'glory' and its cognates, an additional 100 – bringing the total to around 350. From beginning to end, he meditates deeply on the topic of literary fame, as passages from *2 Henry VI* (1.1.92–102, 5.3.29–33) to Sonnet 55 make clear.[63]

The Act 5 Choruses to *Henry V* both bear on Shakespeare's literary quest for fame by engaging in a well-marked strategy of a literary career: the advertisement for both past and future works. To open Act 5, the Chorus pauses to compare Henry's wartime London to Classical Rome:

> Like to the senators of th' antique Rome,
> With the plebeians swarming at their heels,
> Go forth and fetch their conqu'ring Caesar in.
> *Henry V*, Chorus 5.26–8

According to Duncan-Jones, 'Shakespeare looks forward to his next play in the initial comparison of the return of Henry from Agincourt with that of Caesar from his triumph over the sons of Pompey.' Specifically, Shakespeare 'neatly provides the Globe audience with some of "the story so far" as background to *Julius Caesar*'.[64] Yet Duncan-Jones does not record the self-reference in the last line: the Caesarian phrase 'go forth'. In Act 2, scene 2 of *Julius Caesar*, the phrase occurs three times, when the emperor says to his wife, Calphurnia, on the morning of the Ides of March, 'Caesar shall forth ... / Yet Caesar shall go forth ... / And Caesar shall go forth' (10, 28, 48). The repetition is notable because, as editors have long recognized, it *repeats* the repetition in Marlowe's *Massacre at Paris*, where the Guise, about to be assassinated, says, 'Yet Caesar shall go forth ... / Thus Caesar did go forth' (21.71, 91).[65] Shakespeare's allusion to *The Massacre* in *Henry V* may help confirm the Marlovian provenance of the 'great things in small' topos elsewhere in the Chorus.

As Duncan-Jones also observes, 'The Epilogue ... reminds the audience of Shakespeare's earlier work, the *Henry VI* cycle, "Which oft our stage hath shown"', adding: 'Though Shakespeare has often been viewed as careless about personal fame ..., these allusions show him effectively "puffing" his own history plays, ... but doing so in such an affable and relaxed way that we scarcely notice that it is being done'

---

[58] *Georgics*, 3.17–18, in Fairclough 1916–18. On Virgil's use of the chariot as a figure for his poetry, see P. Hardie 1993b: 100–1.

[59] Braudy 1986: 61 n. 4, and see Introduction above.

[60] Hazlitt 1930: iv.21–3.

[61] Gurr 1992b: 46.

[62] Leishman 1961: 22.

[63] See the Index to Cheney 2008a under 'fame', 'glory, Christian', 'literary eternal' and 'immortality'.

[64] K. Duncan-Jones 2001: 113.

[65] See Cheney 2008b: 145–6.

(K. Duncan-Jones 2001: 113–14). Not mere puffery, the allusions to the *Henry VI* trilogy and to *Julius Caesar* constitute Shakespeare's version of the career advertisement made famous by England's Virgil, Edmund Spenser, whose *Faerie Queene* begins with an announcement that the national poet who wrote pastoral in the past progresses to epic in the present (1.Pr.1). Yet, as is almost always the case, Shakespeare's announcement is *counter-laureate*, because in the self-presentment of his counter-career 'we scarcely notice that it is being done'.

'TWO TRUTHS ARE TOLD': SHAKESPEARE'S CAREERS

Did Shakespeare have a literary career? According to our received critical narrative, he did not. Rather, he had a 'professional career', devoted to the commercial demands of the new London theatre. But, according to the narrative he invents in his fictions, as concentrated here in the Choruses of *Henry V*, William Shakespeare *also* has a *second* career, and he uses the theatre to re-imagine the *very concept of a career*. Bending between a professional career in staged theatre and a literary career in printed poems and plays, England's (future) National Poet manages to author the most sustained counter-laureate career on record. Four hundred years later, we are still trying to chart it.

CLASSICAL LITERARY CAREERS AND THEIR RECEPTION

EDITED BY

PHILIP HARDIE
Trinity College, Cambridge

and

HELEN MOORE
Corpus Christi College, Oxford

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521762977

PN
883
C56
2010

© Cambridge University Press 2010

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2010

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
Classical literary careers and their reception / [edited by] Philip Hardie, Helen Moore.
p. cm.
ISBN 978-0-521-76297-7 (hardback)
1. Latin literature–History and criticism. 2. Authorship–History.
3. Authors and readers–History. 4. Authors and patrons–History. 5. Latin literature–
Appreciation–Europe. 6. European literature–History and criticism.
7. European literature–Classical influences. 8. Comparative literature–Classical
and modern. 9. Comparative literature–Modern and classical.
I. Hardie, Philip R. II. Moore, Helen (Helen Dale) III. Title.
PN883.C56 2010
870.9–dc22
2010030168

ISBN 978-0-521-76297-7 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or
accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in
this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is,
or will remain, accurate or appropriate.