

Editorial

The idea of this volume was born in 2014, when celebrations of Shakespeare centenaries started to take place. In the month of April, a Conference entitled ‘Shakespeare 450’, celebrating the four hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Shakespeare’s birth, organised by the Société Française Shakespeare, took place in Paris. On that occasion, the editors of the present volume chaired a seminar whose intent was to discuss issues of authorship, co-authorship and collaboration, the achievements (and pitfalls) of attribution studies, as well as the theme of biography, which we considered a different but complementary issue aiming at the construction of authorship, or at least of the Author.

In the call for papers, we stressed the problematic nature of all these themes, both when oriented towards the reconstruction of texts and when directed towards the construction of the authorial persona. The contemporary increase in and technological development of attribution studies and the surge of biographies published during the last twenty years appeared to us as part of the same project of authentication: on the one hand, attribution studies – especially when computer-assisted – promise to identify that which is irrefutably (scientifically?) Shakespeare, the outcome of which possibly leads to the restoration of the ‘genuine’ text created by Shakespeare’s sole genius; on the other, biography aims at reaching the Author by giving body to an idea of the Person.

At the same time, however, and in mute opposition to the mainstream tendency of attribution studies, a new ‘disintegration’ theory is gaining ground. This trend of study, rather than considering the texts themselves and identifying and isolating the various hands which may have taken part in their composition, re-reads the whole process of the production of plays, from plot-writing to performance, intending to show that the writing of early modern English theatrical texts was, in the final analysis, a ‘play-patching’ (Stern 2009) by several hands working in collaboration. Thus, as has been argued in the case of the Italian *Commedia dell’Arte*, which was an experience in which the apparently authorless text seemed to be created during performance as a joint collaboration of the players, the figure of a ‘collective author’ is emerging also as far as Shakespearean theatre is concerned. The idea is that of a ‘dispersal’ of authorship and of author-ity (Masten 1997), which tends to replace the doubling or tripling of identifiable and separable hands which is at the basis of attribution studies. However, as we evaluate this quasi-heretical point of view, we should acknowledge that the shift in perspective it suggests may have consequences on the way in which we regard and assess texts and on the way in which we describe the material organisation of the Elizabethan-Jacobean theatrical enterprise; and it also – and more importantly – may



have consequences on the way in which we conceptualise the idea of the Author and authorship itself. In addition to these caveats, and as a further threat to the identification of the 'genuine' hand of the author, in the case of early modern texts, manuscripts of which have not been preserved, we should consider the additions and idiosyncratic options and habits introduced by what Roger Chartier calls 'l'esprit de l'imprimeur' (2015); that is, the intellectual component of the decisions taken in the printing house and the many and diverse traces it left on the printed text.

Traditionally, an Editorial should explain what each of the contributions achieves and how the issues discussed by authors and their points of view respond to the whole project. However, Professor Chartier has done this for us as editors in his superb Introduction, devoting space and attention to each of the texts, with an insight and knowledge of both general and particular problems that we would never be able to master. What remains for us, therefore, is simply a retrospective glance at the occasion on which our project took shape and an explanation of the way in which we decided to organise the whole volume.

Speakers at the Paris seminar with their papers, and the audience with the numerous interventions from the floor gave life to an intense debate that confirmed the relevance and topicality of the issues proposed. Many of the papers presented on that occasion appear in this volume, with the addition of other essays gathered in the months that followed the Paris Conference. What became clear, both at the conference itself and subsequently, when collecting the various contributions for publication here, was that the aspects of Shakespeare studies which appeared in our call for papers – Authorship, Biography, Collaboration – are not only arenas of great contestation, but are indeed those which, at this moment in time, are at the forefront of progressive cultural and literary criticism of Shakespeare and his works. Further, the work being undertaken in these fields is so varied, so specific and so topical that the three proposed categories simply could not contain all of the essays submitted. It is for this reason that we have decided to 'expand our brief' and organise our submissions into the four categories shown.

Naturally enough in the year of the 400th centenary of Shakespeare's death, and after Roger Chartier's 'Introduction', we begin the volume with 'Biography and Biographism', a section which attends to and discusses many of the characteristics and properties of what is probably the most plenitudinous genre/sub-genre in the history of literature. It is very likely that this genre/sub-genre will expand exponentially in this year of celebration of Shakespeare's life and thus the essays within this section are a timely intervention in this whole (contested) field of study. This is followed by what would appear to be the more conventional study of 'Authorship, Co-Authorship and Collaboration', but which, given the contributions therein, is anything but conventional. This category is the register of emerging and significant approaches to the study of Shakespeare's writings and indeed to the whole notion of authorship itself.

This field of study has become so fertile in recent years that the approaches taken to the subject matter here are many and varied. A number of these essays border on classification as ‘Attribution Studies’, our next section, a field which has seen a re-emergence of interest not witnessed since the great studies of the early twentieth century. We have categorised them thus in an attempt to identify and capture the essential theoretical underpinning of the various essays. Our final section, ‘Appropriation and Authorship’ discusses the construction of authorship by early readers and editors, in the process fusing our earlier groupings, the contributions therein looping back perhaps in a circular re-connection with our first section on biography in their (unstated) preoccupation with that most important of analytical concepts in the context of Shakespeare, the ‘author function’ (Foucault 1987). In this circularity and this plenitude, the many essays contained within this collection demonstrate that in this year of the marking of the fourhundredth centenary of the death of Shakespeare, more than one life (and the work of more than one author) will be celebrated and remembered. We will be commemorating not just the life of one man, perhaps not *even* the life of one man. Rather, we will be commemorating the historical, social, personal and cultural uses to which this man and his works have been put. We will be celebrating not the life, but rather ‘The Many Lives of William Shakespeare’.

We wish to express our gratitude to the friends and colleagues who presented and discussed their papers at the Paris seminar and agreed to publish them in the present volume, and also to those who later joined the project; to the numerous audience that, on that occasion, enlivened the debate with interventions that were in many cases passionately polemical, thereby convincing us that the topicality of the issues raised deserved publication in a substantial volume; to our referees for their constructive criticism that, in many cases, helped significantly to improve the quality of the articles; and to the Journal Manager, Arianna Antonielli, and her unique, dedicated team of student-editors that once again made the publication of *JEMS* possible.

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