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The Rise of Shakespearean cultural capital:

Early configurations and appropriations of Shakespeare

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This chapter will first discuss Shakespeare's presence in part of the culture around us and then turn to the past in order to understand the journey that has led the Stratford-born dramatist and poet to become the quintessential figure of the author that he is now. After examining some postmodern theoretical views of Shakespeare, as well as the current circulation and merchandising of Shakespeare's representations on the Internet and in mainstream culture, the chapter will demonstrate how such trends find their roots partly in the early configuration of his works in print (especially in the seventeenth century) and in their reception by early readers. Some of the preliminaries of Shakespeare's works will be examined (particularly the now-iconic Droeshout portrait of Shakespeare), as well as the traces and inscriptions left by readers in those books. Indeed, the end of the chapter will focus on actual or 'empirical' readers and their intensive work of appropriation, to explain how Shakespeare first began to gain such cultural capital as a literary author. His paradoxical position in postmodern culture as an author both revered and parodied can be enlightened by the analysis of the complex early modern construction of Shakespeare as a literary figure and the material configuration of his early works.

The postmodern circulation of Shakespeare

Shakespeare's impact on and transformation by postmodern culture is a well-known phenomenon. His works are the most performed globally in a myriad of adaptations and his

reach extends beyond elite circles to encompass popular culture, in particular through various forms of neo-capitalist merchandizing. Thus, Shakespeare's name is used to sell merchandise remotely connected to the Elizabethan playwright or to his works themselves. Shakespeare mints, mobile phone covers, ties, or uncanny tissue box covers and costumed dolls appear perhaps less related to the Shakespeare studied at school or university than the Shakespeare of wedding cakes or Valentine's cards, which relies vaguely on an old trope: Shakespeare the love poet. Needless to say, the postmodern transmedia Shakespeare has also his own Facebook page, which personalises the author, and yet depersonalises him as soon as we access the page that displays a string of generally disconnected posts (Facebook 2018).

Recent scholars now see his texts as 'always in transit'. Shakespeare is construed as 'ever-other-than-itself' and is considered as 'an aggregate forever in flux' (Lanier 2014, 29; 31; 32). Some of the features of postmodernism itself throw further light on these phenomena. As Brian McHale writes, 'The rewriting or recycling of canonical texts is a typical postmodern practice. Sometimes parodic, sometimes not, it occurs throughout the postmodern decades' (McHale 2015, 51). Roland Barthes had already paved the way by noting that the meaning of classical texts nearly always remains in a state of 'suspension' (Barthes 1975, 216-17). In the field of media history, he is currently regarded as a 'paradigmatic author' (Donaldson 2011, 225), one who is 'media-intensive', and a source 'of narratives that move across media as well as space' (226). Moreover, film studies are characteristically 'marked by narrative excess and by an approach to Shakespeare that combines reverence and burlesque' (230). All of these views explain in part why Shakespeare occupies a powerful but paradoxical position in contemporary culture. The First Folio itself (1623), which has been a source of intense scrutiny by textual scholars and theatre practitioners alike, appears in this light as 'a link in a metonymic chain of legacy media' (Donaldson 2011, 233). Some critics would go further seeing the First Folio as a crucial element of an overall Shakespeare allegory

marked by ‘self-conscious and sacralizing nostalgia in response to authoritative but in some sense faded origins’, or as a book offering a somewhat equivocal ‘journey back to a foreclosed origin’ (Fineman 1981, 29; 42).

Many of the aforementioned comments are useful for us to understand how Shakespeare still shapes the world around us. Nonetheless, they remain for the most scholarly narratives which obfuscate an incredibly large part of the rise of Shakespearean cultural capital. While I agree that one cannot possibly pinpoint the origins of that rise, I would not describe all journeys into the past as ‘foreclosed’, or leading necessarily to ‘faded origins’.

On the contrary, a material approach, combined with reception and appropriation studies, as well as the history of the book and the history of reading can illuminate the long and uncertain rise of Shakespeare as a figure larger than himself. It only requires us to take a more empirical look at these so-called ‘faded origins’ to gain awareness of the many agents involved in Shakespeare’s rise: publishers, engravers, booksellers and last, but not least, his readers and their traces in that crucial but foundational period, which spans roughly from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. The story which I am about to tell was not ineluctable, as Shakespeare, like other authors, disappeared from view at certain moments. There are in fact enough material traces to be able, not to produce a teleological tale, but to point to the particular ways he was configured in print, how he was marketed well before the postmodern era and how those who received the least attention for a long time —his readers— appropriated him through their numerous marks and annotations.

The rise of iconic Shakespeare: The visual impact of the Droeshout portrait and the collective quest for the author’s image

Among Shakespeare's early material configurations in print is the notorious Droeshout portrait of Shakespeare. The portrait – or engraving, to be precise – originally appeared in the first collected edition of Shakespeare's plays published in London in 1623, the First Folio, opposite Ben Jonson's epistle 'To the reader' (sig. π 2r), which speaks directly of 'This Figure, that thou seest put', but then appears to try to lead the reader into the plays, as no picture seemingly can live up to them: 'Reader, looke/ Not on his Picture, but his Booke'.

Whether Jonson was demeaning the picture, or simply praising the works, it is true that the engraving has been a repeated source of speculation and criticism. Among the harshest and most famous critiques of the portrait is Samuel Schoenbaum's:

a huge head, placed against a starched ruff, surmounts an absurdly small tunic with oversized shoulder-wings. . . . The mouth is too far to the right, the left eye lower and larger than the right, the hair on the two sides fails to balance. Light comes from several directions simultaneously: it falls on the bulbous protuberance of forehead . . . (Schoenbaum 1970, 11).

Since then, other distinguished Shakespeareans, such as Paul Edmondson and Stanley Wells, have likewise cast serious doubts about the authenticity of the portrait and have argued instead in favour of a picture discovered in 2006, an early Jacobean panel painting, the Cobbe portrait displayed at Hatchlands Park in Surrey. The portrait is so-called because it was formerly owned by Charles Cobbe, Church of Ireland (Anglican) Archbishop of Dublin (1686-1765) (Edmondson and Wells 2012, 1-14).

Yet new archival research by June Schlueter has confirmed that the First Folio portrait is by Martin Droeshout the younger (*b.* 1601, *d.* in or after 1640), who was a third-generation member of a family of artists and engravers, which had been established in London for 40 years at the time of the publication of the First Folio (Schlueter 2017, 18; 23). Backed by concordant documentary evidence, Schlueter further argues that the engraving was probably

done before 1622, when Martin Droeshout was still a novice and trying out his skills as an engraver. As he was just sixteen when Shakespeare died, it is possible that he sketched his engraving from another composition. This would explain the relatively simple, but poor quality of the portrait, which was not meant for publication. Supported by a number of facts, Schlueter concludes that the Folio syndicate, which no doubt had earlier professional links with the Droeshout family, chose to buy the already existing engraving by Martin Droeshout. Therefore, the portrait was never ‘commissioned, but acquired’ (Schlueter 2017, 25; 26; 27; 28). There is good reason to believe this version of events. Indeed, engravings were far more prestigious than woodcut portraits, but producing a book like the First Folio was a risky financial enterprise. Thus, it made naturally more sense to buy an already existing engraving (however imperfect it might be) at a cheaper price than one done especially for the Folio by an experienced engraver.

It seems that the impact of an engraving (rather than a woodcut) could make on readers superseded considerations of exactitude. Judging not only by the portrait’s future renown (no portrait of Shakespeare has been more reproduced and is more recognisable as the Droeshout portrait), but also by the noticeable attention given to it by Shakespeare’s early readers, the Folio syndicate had, with hindsight, taken the right decision.¹ However imperfect the portrait, what Roger Chartier calls ‘the assignation of the text to a single “I” immediately visible’ is there to ‘reinforce the notion that the writing is the expression of an individuality that gives authenticity to the work’ (1994, 52).

What is more, the portrait continued to be printed (with some minor alterations) repeatedly in the seventeenth-century Second, Third and Fourth Folios. It obviously left an imprint in the minds of thousands of readers, who purchased, or borrowed the volumes well into the eighteenth century and after.

For instance, special attention appears to have been given to the portrait by an eighteenth-century reader who ruled in red ink the frame of the portrait in Folger Shakespeare Library (henceforward, FSL) Fo.3 no.13. The Droeshout engraving also stimulated the search for other portraits of Shakespeare. Thus, FSL Fo.1 no. 54, which contains a facsimile of the original engraving is still supplemented, probably by Captain Charles Hutchinson of the Royal Navy (fl.1870), by a reproduction of the Janssen portrait of Shakespeare and another copy of the Droeshout portrait, with handwritten notes under the images, which read respectively for each portrait: ‘This is from the Portrait by Jansen, 1610, supposed to be the best & most authentic, portrait of the great Bard’ and ‘This from old Droeshout’s engraving of Shakespeare’s portrait; but the original is but a course performance’ (front flyleaves three verso and four recto).

Not all readers were as dismissive of Droeshout’s work. Some were just interested in comparing the portraits, as the search for the ‘real’ author’s image was well underway. The Library of Congress Broadhead First Folio has six engraved portraits of Shakespeare with an engraving of ‘The House at Stratford in which Shakespeare lived’. They are currently placed in the same box as the Broadhead First Folio. One of the portraits is a rather weirdsome collage indicative of the lengths some readers would go to in their quest for Shakespeare’s image.

It is a well-known fact that the first few pages of early books often go missing. It is no different for the folios. So, not having the Droeshout engraving could be frustrating to some readers who were missing that precious iconic link between the author and his works. In such cases, a number of readers sought to fill the void by either buying facsimiles of the portrait, or adding other images of Shakespeare. It is the case of FSL Fo.3 no.8, which wants the title leaf and the accompanying portrait. To remedy this, the owner of the folio in question inserted a facsimile of William Marshall’s (fl. 1617-1649) engraving of Shakespeare in his *Poems*

(1640) most likely in the late nineteenth century (as the facsimile corresponds to the frontispiece in Alfred Russell Smith's facsimile edition of the *Poems* (1885)).

While the iconic strategies put in place by the readers we have just studied are relatively limited and their logic is fairly apparent, there are some more extreme examples both in terms and length and breadth. The case study we are about to offer can be linked to what became a nationwide passion for extra-illustrated books (also called grangerized works) that began in the late eighteenth century and reached great heights in the nineteenth century (Ferrell 2013, online). The fashion is not so far from our contemporary practice of scrap-booking, but also differs from it in a number of ways, as we shall see.

Before closing this section, let us examine the work carried out by surgeon and apothecary John Sherwen (bap. 1748, d. 1826) on what is now known as FSL Fo.2 no. 53. Sherwen's Second Folio did have a number of pages missing, a few misbound leaves and it lacked the Droeshout engraving as well.² Yet the preliminaries designed by Sherwen go well beyond the intention of merely filling gaps.

The printed texts, manuscript annotations and illustrations he assembled are not just attempts at reconstructing the folio's opening pages; they form a largely idiosyncratic, miscellaneous and exploratory collection. In fact, Sherwen turned the folio's preliminary pages into something that resembles a miscellany, which he has at times illustrated. As we have noted, the folio is devoid of its Shakespeare portrait and—characteristically— a small oval representation in profile of Shakespeare bearded was cut out and glued onto its inside cover. Moreover, the first flyleaf recto has in its centre an inserted portrait of Shakespeare clearly inspired by the Chandos painting. The portrait is framed by five pasted slips of paper containing manuscript extracts in praise of Shakespeare. Then, on the verso of the second flyleaf is a reproduction of Shakespeare's monumental bust erected in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon, between his death in 1616, and 1623.

The miscellaneous manuscript notes begin on the recto of the third flyleaf and go on for seven pages (more than four leaves). These pages were in fact composed over several years, perhaps decades, as the references on the first flyleaves tend to be taken from books printed before 1800, but from the fifth flyleaf recto extracts are solely from nineteenth-century sources.

Whereas, as we know, in all four folios Ben Jonson's epistle 'To the Reader' directs the gaze away from the facing Droeshout engraving of Shakespeare, '... Reader, looke / Not on his Picture, but his Booke', Sherwen built a genuine paper shrine to Shakespeare around the inserted portrait with cut and pasted manuscript fragments of quotations, creating an intertextual and transmedia collage of homage and worship. The assembled extracts go beyond the Folios' transformation of Shakespeare into a literary figure; they raise the author as creator to superhuman heights. In this way, the portrait is of paramount importance of course as it personifies and authenticates the works. Many of the extracts are there to illustrate Sherwen's belief that portraits reveal the truth of a person.

In this Second Folio, an ink transcription of a poem by Mark Akenside (1721-1770) is pasted onto the top of the page. Interestingly for our purposes, its lines draw a direct link between the dramatist's features and his literary legacy:

... Approach: behold this portrait. Know ye not

The Features? ...

This was Shakespeares Form:

Who walk'd in every path of human Life.

Felt every Passion; and to all Mankind

Doth now, will ever, that experience yield ...³

On the right-hand side of the page, Sherwen recounts how ‘Sir Godfrey Kneller painted a Picture of Shakespeare, which he presented to Dryden’ and how the latter repaid Kneller by writing lines which are driven by a visual cult of the dramatist. Furthermore, they not only place Shakespeare in a literary genealogy, but also give him a ‘godlike’ standing among all other writers:

Shakspeare, thy Gift, I place before my Sight,

With Awe I ask his Blessing as I write;

With Reverence look on his majestic Face,

Proud to be less, but of his godlike Race. ...⁴

It should be clear by now that the Droeshout portrait acted as a cue for many readers to firm up the links between author and work and stimulated a whole array of author-centred solutions and practices that engaged readers in an intense search for the ‘real’ Shakespeare and inevitably fostered the charisma surrounding Shakespeare as well as, indirectly and implicitly, increased the value of what was considered as his sole creations—his works, which readers annotated fervently too. Indeed, Jonson’s epistle, as well as the list of actors present in the folios redirected the gaze towards the plays and the more collective and collaborative world of theatre. In this sense, the First Folio and its ensuing editions adopted an ambivalent stance: not only encouraging the praise of Shakespeare, but also recalling a past and illustrious world, that of Shakespeare’s company of actors, thus completing the Shakespeare ‘legend’.

From a postmodern perspective, the charisma surrounding Shakespeare could be dismissed, as Pierre Bourdieu and others have observed, because the essentialist belief in the charisma of a work is an illusion: a creation of what Bourdieu calls the ‘charismatic economy’, which suppresses ‘the question of what authorizes the author, what creates the

authority with which authors authorize' (1993, 76). Nevertheless, more recent critics, such as Jérôme Meizoz, do see authorship as plural, but are careful to resituate the work of art within the contexts, cultural territories and textual rites that make that work possible in the first place (2007, 14). This is precisely the kind of critical work which we have been trying to do in this section.

The origins of Shakespearean appropriation: Gaining cultural capital through the work of early readers

The last section of this chapter focuses on the work of actual readers of Shakespeare. Before we examine the traces they left in Shakespeare's books, it might be worth remarking that the First Folio does in fact partly require the active assistance and engagement of its readers. In other words, the fate of the volume relied closely not just on its buyers, but also on its readers. This is made particularly clear in Heminges's and Condell's lines addressed 'To the great Variety of Readers', referring to the book's succession of prefaces and commendatory epistles. The preface seeks explicitly to expand the network of readers *and interpreters* of the text: 'And so we leaue you to other of his Friends, whom if you need, can bee your guides: if you neede them not, you can leade your selues, and others. And such Readers we wish him' (Shakespeare 1623, sig. A3r). The idea, as far as we can tell, is that First Folio readers will encounter other readers in the book's paratext and they will in turn encourage new people to join this prestigious and yet open community of commentators.

Consequently, what follows will attempt to show not only what the book brought to readers, but also what they brought to the book, as they took it on numerous personal journeys. The marks they left inside their copies can be construed as forms of consumption of the book and as traces of material, intellectual and emotional involvement. In many cases,

these types of engagement could lead to the construction of yet another author figure. Indeed, as much as readers ventriloquized Shakespeare's writings, they themselves could be ventriloquized by them.

Traditionally looked upon as marks of desecration, graffiti, in most instances, intriguingly celebrate the work, and, at the same time, their own authors. It is common to find parts of the preliminary epistles in honour of Shakespeare copied out by readers in the opening pages of the folios (as, for instance, in FSL Fo. 1 no. 28).

What can be regarded as penmanship exercises or pen trials, may be seen either as attempts at self-expression sparked by Shakespeare's work, or as confident assertions by extremely literate individuals of their mastery of the written medium in a rare book (Scott-Warren 2010, 368). In FSL Fo.1 no.32, on the page bearing Hugh Holland's epitaph 'Vpon the Lines and Life of the Famous Scenicke Poet, Master William Shakespeare', one late seventeenth-century reader has made an incomplete (and possibly half-humorous) attempt at self-expression:

margarit by is my name and
with my peen I wright this same
and if my peen hade ben better
i sholld

In FSL Fo.1 no.54, a late seventeenth-century reader by the name of Olivea Cotton signed her name above Leonard Digges's epitaph to Shakespeare: 'To the Memorie of the Deceased Author Maister W. Shakespeare'. John Lister – another reader of the same period – signed his name in a large italic hand just above Ben Jonson's homage to Shakespeare ('To the memory of my beloved, The Author') in FSL Fo.1 no.70. Lister also inscribed his

signature in elegantly calligraphed letters no fewer than five times near the Hugh Holland epitaph ('Upon the lines and life of the famous scenicke Poet, Master William Shakespeare').⁵

No less obsessive and no less determined to leave an imprint in his own edition, Joseph Batailhey, another late seventeenth-century reader, signed his name on almost every play of FSL Fo.1 no.76.

Many of these inscriptions can be seen as traces of the way in which culture operates as a cycle. As I have suggested, the Shakespeare folios in particular create their own sense of prestige through their format and the manner in which their prefatory material has been configured. To write in such a book is for many early modern individuals a source of prestige and is in some regards empowering ('what one is depends on what one owns', De Grazia 1996, 34). But such writing – often self-consciously ostentatious – inevitably adds further prestige to the book. It is a conscious or subconscious message to other potential readers and is a way to authorize Shakespeare's works.

In a number of folios, individuals celebrate Shakespeare and simultaneously make a show of their own intellectual confidence gained by their ownership of the book. Some of the graffiti in early Shakespeare editions could in fact be considered to be forms of life-writing. In the case of the Shakespeare folios, the books' physical size combined with their prestige as cultural objects and as expensive commercial items could lead at times to extravagant expressions of the self. For instance, in a later Folio (Shakespeare 1664; FSL Fo.3 no.8), the blank page after *Twelfth Night* and facing the opening page of *The Winter's Tale* is entirely covered with the inscription 'John Barnes His Book 1762' drawn in ink and with decorative dots (Shakespeare 1664, sig. Z6r).

On the third flyleaf of FSL Fo.1 no.45, 'The incomparable Shakespear' and the dramatist's last name are elegantly calligraphed across the page in an eighteenth-century hand. Just under these inscriptions, the words 'Knowledge & wisdom' appear.

A reader again celebrates what she or he regards as the intellectually empowering value of Shakespeare's works in FSL Fo. 3 No. 8. On a page of *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare 1664, sig. Kkk5v) the word 'Knowing' has been calligraphed, and the almost Cartesian and partly existential phrase 'Knowing so I am' appears on a page of *Macbeth* (Shakespeare 1664, sig. Ooo4v).

Inspired by the book's preliminaries, readers are tempted to construct a plurality of interpretations, which they attribute to the author. Meaning is hence ascribed to the author in the act of engagement with the text – it is not so much a direct outcome of the text. Nevertheless, the name of the author has also a not-so-negligible effect on readers. It gives some unity to a body of otherwise disparate texts and tends to personalize the works. In this sense, '[t]he work presents itself as a metonymic fetish of the person, as a relic endowed with sacredness and treated as such' (Meizoz 2007, 42).⁶ Meizoz's definition of the fetishization of the work of art may of course be applied to Shakespeare and to the way his readers construct him as an author and, as we have observed, authorize his works.

Be that as it may, all sacred territory can be challenged by those who themselves established the boundaries. Readers never form unified communities and have various agendas. Thus, one finds early examples of negation and parody of Shakespeare – and of course you only negate or parody what has already high value or is sacred. In a First Folio that was sold in 2006 at Sotheby's in London for 2.8 million pounds (now some 3.1 million euro) is a mischievous note written in an eighteenth-century hand, possibly directed at other readers, left on the last page of *Hamlet* (Shakespeare 1623, sig. qq1v): 'But I desier the readerers moughth [mouth] to kis the wrighteres [writer's] arse.'⁷ One can imagine that such a phrase was even more transgressive because it was left in the volume of an already revered and fetishized author.⁸

Conclusion

‘There is nothing outside the text’, wrote Jacques Derrida famously in *Of Grammatology* (1997, 158). Often misconstrued, the phrase has been frequently associated with the almost complete lack of interest in the figure of the author during the second half of the twentieth century, especially in the field of literary studies. Derrida never meant that the text should be totally paramount and completely severed from the author. His idea was rather to give readers an almost limitless freedom of interpretation of the text, even if the figure of the author remained what he called – with a degree of regret – ‘this indispensable guardrail’ (Derrida 1997, 158) that stopped interpretation from straying into nonsense. No one today would contest the importance of the historical or empirical author (even if, in Shakespeare’s case, his *identity* is regularly but unconvincingly disputed). Dramatists counted for little in Elizabethan theatre, yet Shakespeare did have a special status – he was, to some extent, a member of the Establishment, as the Chamberlain’s Men and the King’s Men were hardly obscure companies. Nonetheless, all of this historical fame could not have been perpetuated without his successful entrance into the cultural realm of literary authorship. The transmutation of the historical author into a cultural and fetishized figure has been the subject of this chapter. What I have tried to highlight is the type of cultural work that was done and continues to be carried out to construct Shakespeare as an author. With the preliminaries of his early editions, including the First Folio’s fascinating Droeshout portrait (which continues to circulate in our cultures) and the visible and invisible work of several generations of readers, Shakespeare was ‘pushed by many hands’, to gloss Crites in Dryden’s *Essay of Dramatic Poesie* (1668, 9). This great variety of agents and agencies – together with subsequent dramatists, adaptors, stage directors and interpreters – created and disseminated the Shakespeare we are familiar

with: the omnipresent, endlessly fascinating and ever fleeting figure who is malleable and transferable to a multiplicity of contexts.

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NOTES

¹ For more information on the design of the picture and its later adjustments, see, in particular, Blayney 1991, 18-19; Blake and Lynch 2011, 26-27).

² For an account of this copy's paratext, see its entry in the Folger Library's online catalogue: <http://hamnet.folger.edu/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?BBID=97416>

³ *The poetical works of Mark Akenside* (London: printed for C. Cooke, 1795), p. 256. ESTC T087423.

⁴ Sherwen gives the following reference for the Dryden extracts: "See his Poems, Vol. II. p. 231. Ed. 1743".

⁵ Lister also inscribed some eight female names (possibly family members?) on the same page.

⁶ Translation mine.

⁷ Once the property of Dr Williams's Library in London, the Folio is now in private hands in the U.S.

⁸ On the First Folio as fetish and on its place within the postmodern capitalist economy see Hooks (2016, 186; 193).