

# **On the Uses of Renaissance Genre**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Scholars have long recognized that English Renaissance texts are marked by generic experimentation and ambiguity, but the implications that this carries for the category of genre itself have not been sufficiently explored. The broad contention of this thesis is that the productiveness that marked genre in the early modern period is a consequence of the different uses to which it was put by a variety of stakeholders. For these stakeholders – the playwrights, critics, playing companies, and printers of the early modern period – genre became a site where contests over commercial, pragmatic, and symbolic investments could be played out. Genre in this period thereby functioned as a crucible whereby different interests, themselves products of a changing set of material and social conditions, could vie for power within an arena characterized by commercial and pragmatic investments. Accordingly, this thesis focuses on the matter of use and on the user-groups who repurposed classical categories of genre as a way to extend their own interests. This thesis presents these matters outside the text, and the agents responsible for them, as explanations for the generative nature of Renaissance genre.

## **DECLARATION**

This is to certify that:

The thesis comprises my original work towards the PhD; due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all materials used. The thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of bibliographies and appendices.

Signed: DR

Date: 05/06/2020

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*(London: Will Stansby, 1616), Folger STC 14751 Copy 1. (CC-SA-BA 4.0)*

*<https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/105qvk>*

## Introduction

The fundamental proposition guiding this thesis is that genre is central to Renaissance drama, not only in terms of its production, but also, and just as importantly, in terms of its reception. There is nothing controversial about this claim; indeed, it would be difficult to find a scholar of Renaissance drama prepared to take issue with it. Important monographs such as Rosalie Colie's *The Resources of Kind* and Alastair Fowler's *Kinds of Literature* bear testament to the significance of genre within Renaissance literature. Stephen Greenblatt (*Power*), Anthony R. Guneratne (*Shakespeare*), and Barbara Lewalski (*Renaissance Genres*) have each edited collections on the subject. However, a satisfactory explanation for the instability of Renaissance genre has not yet been provided. Hence, my second proposition: Genre in this period was a site where different user-groups, or stakeholders, could establish and pursue their interests. The instability of Renaissance genre can be understood as a consequence of these different uses.

I argue that the institution of genre was in this period subjected to radical new pressures. These pressures – bound up with new political and religious developments, new social groupings, new technologies, and new economic opportunities – had an effect upon traditional literary genres. In this context, genre functioned as a crucible whereby different interests, themselves products of a changing set of material and social conditions, were played out as interventions within an arena characterized by commercial and pragmatic investments. In this way, genre was a site where real and symbolic capital could be earned and contested. At the nexus of these competing interests, classical categories of genre were remobilized to achieve new purposes, and reshaped in the process. This thesis accordingly examines the activities of stakeholders within three key moments in England during the period between 1580 and 1623, in which the steady, if extra-intentional and often confused repurposing of old genres and genre distinctions for new ends can be observed. These moments cohere around: the composition in 1580 of Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry*, a work considered "England's first philosophically coherent statement of poetics" (Herman 61); the years around 1607 to 1610 when the contestation implicit in the activities of public theatres, private theatres, and playbook printers, and the sometimes discrete interests of authors and audiences, is especially notable; and the publication in 1623 of Shakespeare's First Folio, a work which has profoundly influenced how the genres of early modern English drama are perceived.

The genre transformations that occurred over this period are typically traced through textual changes, but the kind of evidence this furnishes can only ever recreate a part of the story. Scholars have long recognized that Renaissance texts are marked by generic experimentation and ambiguity, but the implications that this carries for the category of genre itself have not been sufficiently explored. Genre is, like language, sometimes too large and too general a category to be easily understandable, let alone to do the work it is often deployed to do. Consequently, genre first needs to be approached at a more micro level. Genre in this period is a volatile category because it is being de facto repurposed under pressurized conditions to meet new ends. Although genre is sometimes held to inhere wholly in the text, I argue that matters *outside* the text played a vital and determining role in its operation. These matters outside the text – these pressurized conditions – are familiar to any early modern scholar, and have at times been discussed under categories like “self-fashioning”, “print”, and “repertory”. But the changes that occurred in genre in this period have not been incorporated into this familiar narrative in any satisfying way.

This thesis consequently emerges from a struggle with existing scholarship and the discussions within it. Although for scholars the text may form the basis of interest, those operating in the fields of historicism, pragmatics, and theory are typically discrete in their orientations, and conceptualization of the early modern period more often than not occurs under the banner of one or another of these approaches. A scholar such as Grace Ioppolo, for example, whose concern is with privileging the manuscript as a historical artefact, resists the incorporation of either pragmatic or theoretical orientations into her discussions. Ioppolo’s bid to resuscitate the figure of the author necessitates a downplaying of the collaborative nature (beyond literal co-authorship alone) of the early modern dramatic environment, as well as a disavowal of theoretical approaches that challenge the author’s centrality. The approach of Tiffany Stern, on the other hand, is in a sense purely pragmatic in that it avers a view of the text as an assemblage of different parts, an aggregate rather than a unified whole, despite the fact that plays are inevitably perceived by their audiences as performing aesthetic functions. Differences such as these make the lines of conceptual demarcation clear. But genre, while it can be conceived conceptually, also displays a peculiar but useful quality in that it is capable of functioning *non-conceptually*. Genre can thus be understood as operating *simultaneously* through pragmatics, history, and theory while not being reducible to any

one of these approaches without losing something essential. Genre, by way of its mutability, can therefore be deployed as a means by which to cycle through ostensibly disparate approaches.

The diversity of views reflects different ways of grappling with the problems of early modern drama, but the justifications provided for these views can be partial and insufficient. The approach to genre adopted within this thesis provides a way of reconciling, rather than dismissing, these otherwise disparate approaches. Although these approaches are largely incommensurable with each other, the scholars working within each have good reasons for prosecuting their views and their contributions cannot be easily dismissed. Genre, as it is conceived herein, is a way to provide *better* reasons for not only the diversity but the correctness of these opinions. Otherwise, it is all too easy to bemoan the fact that many texts of the early modern period cannot be easily accommodated to received genre categories. Of course, in the assigning of texts to genres, it is almost inevitable that there will be “a mismatch between the idealized circumstances in relation to which concepts are defined and the actual circumstances in which concepts are applied” (Sinding 477). For the early moderns, largely confined in their explorations of genre to commentaries inherited from the ancients, this paradox was insoluble. But after Saussure, the idea that language functioned as a system of differences which obeyed its own internal logic became widely accepted. And as Thomas Beebee notes, “the Saussurean principle goes a long way toward explaining the paradox of genres, namely that they seem real and at the same time indefinable” (257). This paradox in itself provides a strong justification for the methodology advanced in this thesis. It suggests the need for scholars to return genre – which, like language, is a mind-made system – to a discursive realm where it can be understood as the consequence of not just theoretical, but also practical, and temporally grounded circumstances. It suggests, in other words, the need for genre to be accommodated to the theoretical, pragmatic, and historicist approaches that are already the mainstay of early modern criticism. Only in this way can a satisfying account of early modern genre be provided.

### **The Problem of Interpretation and Classification**

Different communities of scholars, however, can have different expectations with regard to terminology, and sometimes understandings can be challenged. Writing in 1991,

Roslyn L. Knutson observed that “[t]o approach the success of Shakespeare’s company by way of its entire repertory . . . requires a shift in perspective that would have been anathema to most theater historians as recently as a generation ago” and that, at least traditionally, historians “did not talk much of success in terms of commerce” (*Repertory* 4, 2). Knutson’s ancillary point with regard to the notion of “success” – that it is important to know the assumptions that are implicitly invoked through otherwise seemingly straightforward terminology – is one that is relevant to how genre is discussed by early modern scholars. The “success” or “rightness” of the genre designations appended to texts is often debated, but often the meaning of such terms is by no means clear. Genre does not function in a straightforward way to meet the needs of different stakeholders, and consequently genre terms are subject to contestation. A historicist scholar who accepts the genre designation appended by a stationer to an early modern playbook may not question the designation because it fits with an accepted retrospective account of the ideological pressures bearing upon texts at the time. For a pragmatist scholar, how well the designation enabled the text to achieve success in a commercial marketplace may be the pressing concern. And a scholar more interested in the *techné* of early modern theatre, in how texts were tied to the investments of specific agents and to places of production, may use yet another set of criteria to gauge the genre term’s accuracy. Considerations such as these caution against any assumption that shared terminology denotes a shared object of enquiry. But the point is not that the relative validity of each approach should be assessed; rather, it is that the operation of genre cannot be reduced to any one of them. A satisfying account of genre can only be attained through an engagement with all three approaches, because each is fit for purpose and offers something unique.

By way of example: theorists may attempt to explain aspects of the texts produced in a given period by employing a discourse-specific vocabulary. Importing new terms into the discussion, theorists will render the text in ways that would have been inexplicable during the historical period itself. The specialized terminology associated with genre theory would appear to fit well with this approach. But genre is also inherent within pragmatics, and pragmatics makes possible a different way of orientating the subject of early modern drama in relation to genre. A pragmatic orientation will involve a consideration of how the various agents charged with the formal or technical aspects of dramatic production deployed genre – most obviously through the designations

appended to texts – to fulfil disparate purposes. None of these agents - the playwrights, critics, patrons, actors, theatre managers, and printers of the early modern period – conceived of their activities in ways that would be consistent with those of a modern theorist. Thus, the theorist’s approach can illuminate certain aspects of how genre functioned while the work of scholars in performance pragmatics can be drawn upon to illuminate others.

The approach of Historicist scholars provides another way of conceiving the subject. Historicist scholars investigate issues relating to governance in the period – the structures of religion, economics, and the state itself – in order to illuminate aspects of the text. As such, they are primarily concerned with matters of evidence. Matters of genre may be a concern for the historicist but the actual processes that inform a text’s interpretation, the reasons that a particular term came to be appended to a text, are accepted as unproblematic. With regard to the text, “the-kind-of-thing-this-is” (Frow, *Genre* 102) is considered enduring, and genre is presumed to be located exclusively in textual features. The idea that genre could be located in a reading position, and that this could shift and affect perceptions of the text, is likely to be perceived as anathema. Nonetheless, the work of historicists is vital to this thesis in so far as successful genres, at least to some degree, owe their longevity to a capacity to satisfy the ideological demands of the institutions upon which they depend for existence (Altman 27-8). While not accepting these ideological demands as all-determining, any account of how genre worked in the drama of the early modern period must consider the effect of broader governing forces, and how these were mediated through such agents as the patrons that lent their names to acting companies. Once again, given the multiplicity inherent in the early modern dramatic environment, the significance assigned such agents must be tempered by awareness that they were only one set of stakeholders among many.

This thesis accordingly draws on aspects of each of the above approaches but its methodology is not reducible to any one of these. Genre, as this thesis conceives it, is located both inside and outside these approaches. Genre functions as a mechanism that enables all three approaches to be cycled through and, as such, genre is understood as a paradoxical category that enables linking and rebinding. Each of these approaches can thus be used but also repurposed where necessary, and genre can function in this way because while it can be rendered conceptually, it can also function in ways that are not thematized. As such it can be absorbed by and made a part of the pragmatic, historicist,

and theoretical approaches, while simultaneously retaining a capacity to operate independently of any particular interest or set of interests. Genre, as conceived herein, is marked by a capacity to be both labile and determining: it can to some degree be shaped by the existing approaches while also shaping them in return. This thesis therefore presents new knowledge, and its methodology advances something original about the way genre worked in the early modern period.

The virtue of this methodology is that, in adopting genre as an orientation, it can be responsive to a set of demands that would otherwise fall outside the remit of a discrete approach. Genre terms, for example, are routinely accepted as stable and non-problematic. But as Andrew Hadfield notes, citing the work of Bakhtin, “a generic form cannot simply be read as if it existed without an external history; it is as foolish to imagine that texts can be read as if a label like epic, comedy, lyric, or . . . *de casibus* tragedy, adequately defined their existence, as it is to read them as if their form merely contained their content” (89). The point, once again with reference to John Frow, is that when dealing with a text it is important to know “the-kind-of-thing-this-is”, but it is not possible for this kind of information to be conveyed through terminology alone. Genre terms like tragedy, comedy, and history – although routinely treated as unproblematic – are only conceived on the basis of interpretation. The genre terms assigned texts may come to appear self-evident, but it makes little sense to assume that contestation over genre terms did not exist in the early modern period. Although often disguised, the process of assigning a genre to a text is problematic, and it remains so to this day. Texts, of course, do not announce their own genres; this task falls to those with vested interests.

A relatively recent example illustrates the challenges confronting those who use genre, “a shared convention with social force” (Frow, *Genre* 102), to meet discrete interests. On the Folger Shakespeare Library’s blog, *The Collation*, an entry by Meaghan J. Brown from 2017 details the creation of the Library’s *Digital Anthology of Early Modern English Drama*. In order to ensure a cataloguing system consistent with that of external collections, curators consulted with a division of the American Library Association, deciding on eight genre categories for a corpus of 403 plays. However, even given the taxonomical aid of the outside institution’s “approved, standardized terms” and “Controlled Vocabularies”, the process was not straightforward. Problems of interpretation and the chimerical nature of the genre quest itself soon asserted

themselves. Curators, despite having successfully petitioned for more categories, were “left with thirteen obstinate plays that didn’t fit neatly”. Six of these plays were by the one author, the prolific Thomas Heywood, and on the basis of theme alone, were candidates for inclusion under the category of “Classical Legends”. This category, more properly considered a topic or subject-matter, was not one of the American Library Association’s agreed-upon and institutionally endorsed genres. Another six plays looked for all intents and purposes to be members of the history genre, but only if the small matter of their not actually being concerned with real events could be overlooked. Then there was one especially obstinate play, James Shirley’s *Saint Patrick for Ireland, part 1*, which in its singularity seemed to play havoc with the very notion of genre itself.

John Turner has noted that Shirley’s play is “in many ways, an atypical play within the canon of English Renaissance drama” (63). Thematically, it bears affiliation with the miracle dramas of the medieval period but, having been first performed in 1639, it is unable to be included within this corpus. The tradition, however, is certainly relevant to any attempt at making generic sense of Shirley’s play, as is the indebtedness which *Saint Patrick* bears to the chronicle history plays that first emerged in the 1580s repertory of the Queen’s Men. The atmosphere of the play has been called bittersweet, “of the kind that often informs tragicomedy” and, for all its vaunted singularity, the play contains characters that are conventional for the period – most notably sorcerers and clownish servants – and which appealed to audiences of the time (J. Turner 56). Clearly, it is difficult to know which of these features to privilege, but the play displays features recognizable from other plays. Thus, while it may have been experimental in its own time, it is unlikely that *Saint Patrick* was considered unique. What has changed is that the system of genre which existed in the era when the play was being performed, the very background against which the play could be understood, is no longer available for those coming to the play.

It is the matter of use that shapes genres and genre systems, and it is this which can be used to explain why *Saint Patrick* no longer fits neatly into recognizable genre categories. Genres fulfil different ends for their users, and over time texts can be shaped by new uses. The genres in which the texts participate will accordingly shift in accordance with these new uses. *Saint Patrick*, however, is a play which has been largely forgotten. When the Folger went looking for its genre, therefore, there was no possibility of being guided by how audiences were using the play. Instead, textual

features were the only guide and, since genre is less in the text than the uses to which the text is put, this presented a conundrum. This play, unlike plays in the canons of more famous playwrights, no longer participated in any well-established or easily recognizable genres. The matter of use therefore suggests how this play, and the Folger's other "thirteen obstinate plays", became unmoored from their generic origins. This in turn helps to explain something about the methods deployed in this thesis. This thesis is concerned with the early modern theatre industry and the contributions made by particular stakeholders to processes of genre formation. As a consequence, the plays discussed are largely canonical, and some groups associated with the industry are excluded from this discussion. For example, although Matteo Pangallo has shown that the work of amateur dramatists constitutes a rich field of enquiry, these dramatists were not stakeholders within the industry in any straightforward way. As Pangallo observes, "[t]hey were not actors, managers, sharers, or regular dramatists" and, therefore, "were not regular *producing* participants in that industry" (3, italics in original). As such, the work of these dramatists falls outside the concerns of this thesis.

As the genre theorist Rick Altman notes, "[f]or a genre to exist, a large number of texts must be produced, broadly distributed, exhibited to a large audience and received in a rather homogeneous manner" (84). Effectively, this means that a large number of people share the same perception of these texts and are in agreement about the ends which they fulfil. Modern romance novels, the kinds of books synonymous with the term "genre fiction", can be understood in this way, as can well-known film genres like the Western or the Musical. These genres have been shaped by the use-value which they hold for their audiences, and audiences are able to make sense of these genres through their semantic dimension – the inclusion of thematic material that is recognizable through its real-world referents – as well as through their syntactic dimension – the text's "grammar" which is familiar from other texts. Easily recognizable examples like the Western or the Musical render unremarkable Tzvetan Todorov's claim that "[a] genre, whether literary or not, is nothing other than the codification of discursive properties" (18). But this concretization of a particular complex of topic and structure, dependent on agreement between the various groups involved in the production and reception of texts, fosters the impression that genre functions in a straightforward way to serve the needs of various authors, producers, distributors, and readers (Altman 101). When there is disagreement about a text's genre, however, the situation is quite

different. Rather than appearing to inhere in the text, genre is instead shown to be located in an interpretation of the text. The trials inherent within the Folger's classification process are evidence of this.

### **Genre's Systemic Existence**

It is because "genres are not positive classes, defined only by their salient features" but are also "defined in relational terms" (Frow, *Genre* 125), that the concept of system is so crucial to their understanding. The terms used to define genres are therefore derived from larger dynamic and culturally specific systems. Texts might be difficult to categorize because the genre systems which render them readily comprehensible can shift, and this demands that they be construed according to new systems. If genre, as Altman has it, is composed of both referential and intertextual dimensions, the temporal remoteness of the early modern period challenges the modern reader's ability to understand "the culture and its assumptions, rules and myths" (189). Deprived of a referential dimension, a reader's attention will shift to that which is more familiar, other texts, in order to achieve a generic orientation that will aid in comprehension. But the situation here is complicated by the attenuation that occurs within a corpus over time. In the field of early modern drama, so pronounced is the influence of Shakespeare that the narrowing of the corpus to genres to which he contributed is often unacknowledged. This process of narrowing is in itself unremarkable. Critics tend to work by identifying a number of texts within a given corpus that can be isolated in order to form "the genre's putative Platonic ideal" (Altman 24). Typically, it is those texts which challenge consistency and complicate the critic's argument which are excluded from analysis and which remain outside this select corpus. As a result, popular perception of a given genre may come to reside in the texts that a critical orientation has privileged, and it is against such texts that others will be assessed for membership.

It is for this reason that certain texts are marked by complexes of topic and structure that signal the genres in which they participate whereas other texts appear to have very few distinguishing features. It is safe to assume that the features codified through continued production will be those with a broader cultural resonance, those which satisfy an audience's desire to see some aspect of their collective experience memorialized, and therefore reinforced, through a medium significant within their historical time and place. It was the theatre which in the early modern period satisfied

this desire. Genres, too, are dependent for their existence on real-world institutions which provide the material support necessary for their continued production (Altman 91). For their part, these institutions are invested in genre because of the different kinds of work it can perform. The Folger and the American Library Association are comparable institutions, both members of the critical establishment whose interest in genre is a consequence of a shared need for a usable taxonomy that can enable the ongoing use and preservation of early modern plays. But the fact that these two organizations cannot easily achieve their shared goals underscores the limitations attendant upon conceiving genre solely in terms of a taxonomic function, and by way of a genre system that is dominated by the work of one playwright. Indeed, for the early modern theatre companies and printers who were involved in the initial production of these plays, and who existed in a period before Shakespeare's ascendancy, this taxonomic function may not have been that important. Genre's role in ensuring a correct alignment of text and audience may have been more significant for these genre users and institutions. For Altman, this means that genres – however settled they may appear – are in a permanent state of contestation, wherein different user groups vie for control of the terms under which texts are received, and in doing so, contribute to the processes by which genres are formed and eventually morph or disappear. The idea that genres are rendered fit-for-purpose by different stakeholders is key to the arguments presented in this thesis.

### **Genre Theories in Contest**

In this thesis, I draw on Altman's approach to genre in order to better understand how those groups who participated in the production and reception of early modern dramatic texts – specifically playwrights, playing companies, members of the critical establishment, and stationers – used the resources of genre as an effective surrogate for their own interests. Altman's positions on genre, unduly neglected in early modern scholarship, offer a productive way of understanding the activities of these early modern genre users. Consistent with Altman's idea that genre represents a permanently contested site, I refer to these groups as "stakeholders" in order to convey a sense of how the uses which they imagined for texts inevitably brought their conceptions of genre into conflict, and how that conflict continues to be felt today. To appreciate this, it is only necessary to consider that the use of genre by early modern theatre companies

plying their wares to a heterogeneous audience would have differed from the genre strategies adopted by stationers. Stationers, competing for a much more select audience would have had recourse to niche conceptions of genre appealing to discrete segments of purchasers. By way of contrast it is worth considering again how the Folger's use of genre is determined by its own institutional demands, and how in its case the need for a schema broad enough to accommodate a range of early modern texts and genres is crucial. The Folger's fit-for-purpose use may not correspond with how the early moderns used genre and, where the earlier use has not retained currency, it may be difficult to ascertain what purpose texts fulfilled for their audiences. In each of these instances, pragmatic requirements dictate the way genre is conceived and the ends that it fulfils for different user groups.

While the uses of genre are always specific to different users, when genres are conceived retrospectively the emphasis is inevitably on the notion of corpus and the various ways that a corpus can be appropriated in critical terms. Thus, in any consideration of Renaissance drama, scholars will tend to privilege genre's taxonomic dimension rather than attempt to answer the sort of questions that are generated by a conception of genre as a process. Attachment to a classical model of organization, however, invariably leads to the kind of conundrums that are, even for the best scholars, insoluble. As derived from the *Poetics*, wherein Aristotle defined genres as kinds of imitation marked by distinctive features or "component parts" (3, 20), the "standard commonplace notion of genre" presupposes the existence of shared "criterial" features among texts (M. Turner 150). Essentialist in the assumption that categories are the logical emanations of textual features rather than, for example, a human cognitive response to those features, the classical-definitional model is unable to accommodate the notion that genres shift diachronically, and that each text only ever displays some of the criterial features that are supposedly necessary for its inclusion within a given genre. Consequently, the neoclassical tracts that were penned in defence of these ideas in the early modern period were necessarily normative interventions within an unruly practice.

Alliance to the classical model does not, however, necessarily invalidate a theorist's contribution to the field, and Alastair Fowler's *Kinds of Literature* (1982) is emblematic in this regard. Conscious of the inaccuracy inherent in many reflexive responses to the concept of genre as a template for creation, Fowler refutes the commonly held

perception that genre represents a “mere curb on expression”, noting instead that “it makes the expressiveness of literary works possible” (20). With an emphasis on the idea of genre as process, Fowler observes that across time genres change “not only their own parameters but their relations to neighbouring genres”, and that consequently just as genres themselves are not transhistorical, neither is the respect accorded their various manifestations at particular historical moments (11). With the related recognition that the tendency to align genre primarily with classification constitutes “a venerable error” (37), it is perhaps more surprising that Fowler retains the classical theory’s conception of genre as a set of textual features. The crux of Fowler’s argument remains resolutely tied to the notion that genres objectively exist, and it is in attempting to overcome the shortcomings of this theory’s reliance on the doctrine of essential features that Fowler has recourse to Wittgenstein’s model of family resemblances.

Wittgenstein’s model of family resemblances, as Altman notes, is problematic in that it takes as its starting point a culturally shared object of enquiry and a uniform process of analysis. It therefore obscures the different ways that genre can be construed and the different investments that various users have “behind an apparently natural process” (98-99). Positing objective criteria as the basis for categorization and using the example of games, Wittgenstein implores the reader to really look and see in order to discover the existence of an inherent logic. Wittgenstein does not consider that those doing the looking may have little in common. In other words, because different positions induce different perspectives, the shared object of enquiry that Wittgenstein posits may be illusory. Each viewer may be looking at an individuated version formed from a discrete set of assumptions and beliefs. This may present the possibility of a potentially endless play of subjectivity, as in Wolfgang Iser’s formation of reader-response theory which posits the capacity of each reader to “write” the text, but arguably within the realm of genre the risk of this endless play is averted. As Stanley E. Fish would contend, interpretive communities approach texts by way of a shared strategy which ensures that some form of consensus about a text’s meaning is achieved (“Interpreting” 483). With regard to genre, this means that there is necessarily agreement about the textual elements that are privileged and that are considered determining. However, Fowler’s adoption of Wittgenstein’s model for his discussion of genre means that this alternative hypothesis – that genres are the product of the various interpretations that different stakeholders bring to bear upon texts – does not receive its due. Nonetheless, it is only

through considering this less tangible dimension of genre that new possibilities for exploration open up. If conundrums are an inevitable corollary to the classical theory of genres, it is because, although a text's eligibility for membership within a genre is determined by its relationship to other texts, "genres are never made up of texts alone, however numerous" (Altman 83). What must be considered also are those more abstract, but no less forceful or consequential, determinants like audience activity and the generic terminology that influences the reception of texts (Altman 84). It is such determinants that open up the idea that genre exists in what Altman terms a multiplicity of locations, a possibility that is not explored in Fowler's study.

Approaches to genre within early modern studies tend to bear the hallmarks of Fowler's influential monograph. At times, as the Folger example illustrates, it has been taken for granted that genres objectively exist and that genre itself is a product of the text, inhering in textual properties and nowhere else. Given the range of stakeholders involved in the production and reception of early modern texts, this conception is clearly inadequate to enable a grasp on how genre functioned within the period. But although the shortcomings of the classical approach have received much attention from genre theorists, the approach maintains its sway. In contrast, the theory outlined by Altman enables a more expansive conception of genre that, if applied to the early modern field, could enable long-held but out-dated assumptions to be challenged. In shifting the emphasis from "the innate properties of [texts] . . . to the physical and social context in which [texts] are used" (97), it is entirely consistent with the kind of historicist approaches that continue to yield fresh insights.

### **Moving beyond the Classical Approach to Genre**

Given the classical theory's limitations, it has been necessary to reconceptualize the way genre is perceived within early modern studies, and I draw on the contributions of Altman and other modern genre theorists in order to do this. At a fundamental level, as Frow observes, "[g]enre is, amongst other things, a matter of discrimination and taxonomy: of organising things into recognizable classes" (*Genre* 51). But the process whereby this organizing occurs is not as straightforward as it may at first appear. Adena Rosmarin notes that "representation denies both its conceptual medium and its pragmatic purpose" and this "is the denial of genre writ large" (10). To put this another way, genre designations appear stable, in some instances almost transhistorical, while

the processes behind their formation remain largely obscure. Although the experimentalism of many Renaissance texts provided ample evidence of a literary practice that was not dependent on the imitation of ideal models, the first major challenge to the classical view of genre did not occur until the advent of Romanticism. It was not until this moment that the notion of genres as stable, universal categories was challenged by a new realization that genres were historically shifting entities. As David Duff notes, this reconceptualization is “the single most important factor separating modern from earlier genre theory” (*Modern* 232) but, nevertheless, acceptance of its implications has been slow. Indeed, it is with the notion of genre as a rigid template which threatens creative autonomy that Romanticism – and later, Modernism – is more readily associated (Duff, *Modern* 1). The classical-definitional view, then, is in actuality something akin to a folk theory which, despite a lack of veracity, exercises a tenacious grip on the imagination. As Michael Sinding notes, “few alternatives to definitions have been proposed, and none has caught on . . . [so] the classical view (and its doppelganger, general category scepticism) keeps coming back” (478). Given the allegiance to the classical view, it is not surprising that canons of literature are marked by anomalies, or by texts whose discursive features are not axiomatic of their genres.

Hans Robert Jauss’s *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (1982) is a work that makes the historicity of genres key to its overarching argument. Consistent with one of the tenets of modern genre theory, “that genres cannot be studied in isolation, only in relation to one another” (Duff, *Modern* 29), Jauss’s reception theory is grounded in his concept of the “horizon of expectations” as the specific “genre system that pre-constituted the intention of the works as well as the understanding of the audience” (Jauss 108). As such, one of his primary aims is “to rediscover, by means of empirical scholarship, the genre concepts and classification systems that have shaped the writing and reading of literature in the past” (Duff, *Modern* 127). While Jauss is concerned with the historicization of genres, he is at pains to avoid a “mere descriptive listing” of a past age’s classifications (Frow, *Genre* 70). Accordingly, between the extremes of abstract theorizing and empirical classifying, Jauss attempts to account for genres by way of a historical or immanent poetics. It is a period’s poetics, or system of literature, that enables the discursive properties inherent in genres to be codified in a historically specific way. A poetics, despite appearances to the contrary, is continually in flux and so the horizon of expectations against which works are read is always being transformed.

Notions of genre are dependent on specific historical circumstances and consequently alter over time, meaning the expectations of later generations will be informed by different sets of criteria. Jauss's aesthetics of reception, and his concept of the horizon of expectations, "the background understanding" that "actively structures what we are able and likely to perceive in the reading of a text" (Frow, *Genre* 147), is crucial to understanding the different terms under which genre operated in the early modern era. The horizon of expectations is closely tied to the significance that relationships play in perception, and it is this dimension of the theory that is explored in the work of E. H. Gombrich. In a helpful example, Gombrich reflects on the role of art restorers by noting that, "[w]hat we want of them is not to restore individual pigments to their pristine colour, but something infinitely more tricky and delicate – to preserve relationships" (49). The fluidity of genre, however, means that the relationships that existed as part of a work's original horizon of expectations can be lost. The difficulty inherent in recovering this original horizon helps to explain how the same text can be read differently across generations. As Frow notes, "genres are not positive classes, defined only by their salient features, but are defined in relational terms which distinguish these features according to their place and function" (*Genre* 125). When relationships shift, so do meanings. The importance of apprehending genres in this immanent context can be overlooked in the field of Renaissance drama despite the frequently invoked imperative to "always historicize".

Rosalie Colie, in *The Resources of Kind: Genre Theory in the Renaissance* (1973), similarly notes the value of genre lies not in its classificatory function but in its ability to offer different modes – or as she puts it, different "frames" or "fixes" – for interpreting the world. Recognizing that each era has a different system of poetics, and emphasizing the role played by received models of composition, Colie asks "what kinds of 'kind' did writers recognize and why?" (2). For Colie, "imitation of formal models, was in spite of its inbuilt conservatism a factor for literary change and imaginative experiment" (4), a crucial part of the mechanism by which genres transform over time. Conceiving of the kinds as "tiny subcultures . . . [that] melt into one another" (116), she notes the tendency of Renaissance literary practice to go against Aristotle's implied dictum "that styles must not be mixed" (8). Colie, then, locates within the early modern veneration of ideal models a background against which new alternatives could emerge, and against which the innovation so characteristic of the period could be set in relief.

## The Interdependence of Genre and Authorship

This thesis contends that the popular understanding of genre in the modern era cannot be reconciled to the ways in which early moderns understood the operation of its cognate, “kind”. Affected by broader historical shifts, genre is now so differently conceived that any straightforward homology with its early modern usage has been rendered impossible. Like so much else pertaining to the early modern period, any retrospective conceptualization of genre is almost inextricably bound to the figure of William Shakespeare. While it is patently the case that “a genre extends beyond any individual writer” (Fishelov 15), it is nevertheless difficult to think of certain Renaissance genres outside of Shakespeare’s influence, or more precisely, the import that the critical tradition has bestowed upon that influence. The emblematic genres of the period – tragedy and comedy – are most familiar with the epithet “Shakespearean” attached, and the ubiquity of this label promotes a sense of teleological correctness, as if the Shakespearean were a logical incarnation. The critical currents that have arisen from the category of problem play are indicative of the level of attention garnered by the Shakespeare canon. Neil Rhodes, noting the passing of “that supposedly discrete category of Shakespeare text recognized by critics for much of the twentieth century”, speculates that at some point in the 1980s it became almost redundant because “by then all texts were problematic” (609). Or perhaps, to gloss it differently, by then all texts were considered worthy of critical investment and hence likely to generate the conundrums previously recognized only in relation to the Shakespeare canon. That the term “problem play” should have gained ubiquity in discussions of Shakespeare’s work but not in discussions of Shakespeare’s contemporaries points to the anomalous level of critical investment that one individual’s canon can generate. The pre-eminence of Shakespeare’s role within Western culture, of course, hardly needs to be argued. Quite simply, Shakespeare matters – in many different ways to many different people – and, as a consequence, the genre designations appended to Shakespeare’s plays invite endless appraisal and reappraisal.

For this most high-profile of canons, the stakes are high and the problems confronted by editors of Shakespeare are especially pronounced. David Bevington expresses the “category scepticism” (Sinding 478) felt by many when, in his Arden 3 edition of *Troilus and Cressida*, he observes that the experimental nature of the play precludes its inclusion in any “Procrustean bed of generic classification” (5). As he puts it:

Those who see the play as a tragedy of 'defeated potential' and 'tragic waste' readily concede that it lacks catharsis and does not invite deep sympathy for its characters. Defenders of the play as a 'history' of the Trojan war emphasize its episodic structure and mixture of comedy with high seriousness, and point out that a number of history plays like *King John* and *Richard II* contain elements of tragedy, but must also confront the fact that the so-called tragedies (such as *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*) are often historical. 'Satirical comedy' or 'problem play' are useful terms in analysing the play's insistent mocking and raillery, but are too easy or nebulous for some observers; general agreement as to what constitutes a 'problem play' is hard to find. (4-5).

Bevington's dissection points to the significance accorded genre by editors of Shakespeare. Genres are ideologically freighted and carry any number of associations, so it is no simple matter to assign one to a play in the Shakespeare canon. The desire in this instance to keep *Troilus and Cressida* somehow separate from the rough and tumble of genre contestation is emblematic of the singularity awarded Shakespeare. Questions pertaining to the work of Shakespeare are not easily answered and this is not just because of the complexity within the work itself. Rather, it is a consequence of the number of people who have an interest in contending a viewpoint, the sheer number of stakeholders attempting to make a claim. An awareness of the semantic loading that genres accrue over large spans of time, and a reluctance to subject individual texts to a less than ideal match within an inherited genre system, can be paralyzing. But the tension between genre assignment and authorial autonomy, a matter of concern for Bevington and other critics, would not have been relevant for early modern stakeholders.

While the research of scholars into the material conditions of early modern dramatic production has greatly enriched the conception of authorship in that period, this nuanced approach has not been extended to discussions of the relationships between texts and their genres. The designation ascribed to a text is routinely thought to be wholly a consequence of the textual features which inhere in that text, which in turn are a consequence of the decisions made by the author in the act of composition. Genres are indeed implicitly authored, although it is simplifying matters to assume that the author in question is the playwright. *Troilus and Cressida*, as Bevington observes, has been ascribed various genres since its initial publication in quarto. What is less often observed, however, is that each designation reveals as much about the reading position

of a particular scholar as it does about the play. Similarly, the genre designations that are ultimately appended to texts are the consequence of a process of contestation wherein various stakeholders have vied to control the terms by which the text is understood. In the early modern period, the theatre managers, playwrights, critics, and stationers involved in the production of dramatic texts on stage or in print each wished to preserve and engender their own interests – whether economic or aesthetic – through the propagation of particular reading positions. These stakeholders, in effect, were the authors of the designations which, attendant upon industry support, ultimately become aligned with plays. The intention of the actual author with respect to the text's genre designation – even if it were possible to know this – is not privileged in this contest.

Given that, as Marta Straznicky puts it, print is now appreciated as “a semantic field, its materials and dispositions carrying a multitude of meanings that invite both analytical and critical interpretation” (*Stationers* 3), it is odd that there has been comparatively little attention paid to the issue of how genre functioned in the early modern period. Stephen Orgel's observation that “genres possess a reality independent of particular examples and are not simply classifications but carry with them measures of value” (*Authentic Shakespeare* 145) highlights the potential which the study of genre offers for engagement with the broader cultural forces of the early modern period. But despite the emphasis placed by New Textualism on the cultural agency of those involved in the production of dramatic texts, it is not broadly recognized that the genre designations appearing on title-pages constituted another way in which a play was authored. Indeed, these designations can be understood as affecting the reception of the playbook in the same way as other decisions made by the publishers, printers and booksellers. The decisions made by various agents with regard to genre can consequently be understood in a more nuanced way if it is accepted that, as Altman asserts, “[a]ll genre terms are implicitly authored; that is, they are always the product of a specific user group” (99). The idea that genre designations are authored, and the consequence of a process of contestation whereby only one stakeholder's version of the text becomes instantiated through industry endorsement, is consistent with the qualified view of authorship that has emerged through recent research into the material conditions of early modern dramatic production. Genres, therefore, represent “a site of struggle among users” (Altman 99) with various agents vying to influence the text's

reception by way of the reading position invoked. Once the notion of genres being authored is accepted, a new way of understanding the involvement of these agents is suggested. They become stakeholders in a contest for control of the text, to which end they harness the power of genre.

In the modern world, as testified by the connotations of a term like “genre fiction”, the concept of genre is often conceived in pejorative terms. For a culture that places a premium on the originality of artistic invention, the received idea that works should conform to a pre-ordained template is clearly anathema. This orientation towards the concept of genre finds an analogue in the modern consumer world where “nothing is less desirable than generic products” (Altman 115). More explicitly, when the concept of genre is invoked in regard to artistic creation, Frow observes instances of what he terms “a familiar post-Romantic resistance to genre understood as a prescriptive taxonomy and a constraint on textual energy” (*Genre* 26). A notion of authorial autonomy that has been held almost sacrosanct since the Romantic era is thereby challenged. But assumptions of artistic autonomy were far from commonplace in the Renaissance where it was more generally held that poets practised an imitative discourse within the bounds of an already established tradition (Burke 5). In commenting on the period’s approach to artistic creation, Gombrich writes: “[n]o one doubted in those days that all art was ‘conceptual’ in the sense that you had first to learn and practise how to draw ‘a man’ before you were even allowed to try your hand in the life class” (134-5). As Walter Ong has observed, a text depends on its creator’s familiarity with the “textual organization of experience”, and the creator’s indebtedness to a common reserve of formulas and themes was especially apparent in the oral and manuscript cultures that preceded the arrival of print (131).

In recent decades, scholars have increasingly recognized that understanding the different terms under which authorship functioned in the early modern era is key to re-establishing a more accurate perspective on the era’s dramatists. While print culture, promulgating a view of the text as “a unit in itself”, would give rise to “the [R]omantic notions of ‘originality’ and ‘creativity’” (Ong 131), Renaissance literary theory emphasized the significance of tradition over individual creation. For English Renaissance dramatists, much of this tradition had been inherited from the writers of the classical age – the lack of a meaningful connection to a vernacular tradition being the consequence of “great changes in the English language, and the sporadic printing of

medieval literature” (Vickers, *Renaissance* 4) – and so the veneration of rhetoric and more generally Greek and Roman models of literature was a logical consequence. This classical tradition, however, was transmitted, and in turn transmogrified, by the material conditions in which Renaissance dramatists worked and by which their artistic expression was bound. When, alongside the early modern bias away from individual creation, these material conditions surrounding dramatic production are taken into account, modern assumptions of artistic autonomy demand some qualification. Before returning to an explication of genre and the issues surrounding its usefulness as a critical tool, I will look at the contributions of various scholars whose research into early modern dramatic production has influenced conceptions of authorship in that period. I turn, first of all, to an intervention by Gary Taylor which illuminates how the modern privileging of authorship has resulted in a valorization of individual achievement, and of one playwright, that cannot easily be accommodated to the reality of the material conditions that obtained in the early modern period.

In *Reinventing Shakespeare* (1989), Gary Taylor has questioned the empirical basis of the pre-eminence awarded Shakespeare in Western culture, challenging the reputed singularity of Shakespeare’s achievement’s both within the early modern era itself and across other times and cultures. Taylor’s is an important intervention because works of drama are constructed within a complex matrix formed from other texts and are dependent on this context for meaning. The singularity of Shakespeare within the modern era, however, distorts and even reverses the terms inherent in such a relationship. Thus, rather than Shakespeare being understood within a broader framework of early modern cultural production, it is typically the case that other playwrights are understood by way of their relation to Shakespeare. It is not wise to “glorify one writer while denigrating many” (Taylor, *Reinventing* 407), and so it is important to question the degree to which this privileging of Shakespeare has coloured perception of the whole Renaissance canon. The need to do so is made even more apparent upon recognition that, ironically, of all the playwrights who contributed to the flourishing of dramatic art within this period, it is Shakespeare “whose work is characterized by an unequalled capacity to absorb the styles and techniques of his fellow writers” (Shapiro 8). Indeed, it is not only in the formal characteristics of plays that this capacity is displayed. Shakespeare’s indebtedness to the work of other artists and thinkers, as a book like Jonathan Bate’s *Shakespeare and Ovid* makes clear, is also

apparent at the level of content. Frank Kermode usefully offers that “Shakespeare was a *thinker* who did his thinking in dramatic dialogue . . . [and that] the thinking is not of the sort that might be expected of a philosopher or a divine” (127). Pointing this out does not detract from Shakespeare’s gifts as a dramatist, and it might be added that dialogue composed by a philosopher is unlikely to be celebrated for its lexical richness. But conceding the numerous points of intersection which the work of Shakespeare has with that of other dramatists and with the broader currents of early modern culture can function to correct an otherwise all too pervasive tendency: that of using the Shakespeare canon as the background for discussion of the plays within it. The self-authorizing circularity of this approach is one reason why the significance ascribed to Shakespeare far exceeds that awarded to any of his Renaissance drama contemporaries or, indeed, as Taylor notes, to any other writer. But the notion that Shakespeare was held in comparable esteem within his own time is largely attributable to received wisdom rather than empirical data. Indeed, this view of Shakespeare is now so firmly established that, as Martin Wiggins observes, there is often resistance to the fact that “Shakespeare imitated other dramatists just as they imitated him” (*Shakespeare 2*). The corollary to such resistance – a tacit acceptance of something akin to a process of autogenesis in the creation of Shakespeare’s works – renders the most paradigmatic of playwrights unrepresentative and cannot be defended without recourse to critically outmoded notions of authorial sovereignty.

If the cult of literary celebrity cannot be understood as an extension of the merit awarded Renaissance playwrights in their own time, reasons must be sought elsewhere for the pre-eminence Shakespeare has come to hold in Western culture. Michael Dobson, in *The Making of the National Poet* (1992), has traced the lineaments of this rise and shown that the posthumous reputation of Shakespeare cannot easily be separated from the Enlightenment practices which influenced the reception of his works within a new historical moment. Although the desire to “remake” Shakespeare according to new tastes has been a remarkably consistent phenomenon, Dobson argues that it was the Enlightenment that inaugurated those “ways of presenting and representing Shakespeare [that] have endured for so long” and which as a consequence of such longevity are now “virtually invisible”. (3). More remarkable is the fact that, as Dobson makes clear in his treatment of the many altered versions of Shakespeare’s plays that graced the stages of Augustan England, “adaptation and canonization, so far from being

contradictory processes, were often mutually reinforcing ones” (5). Thus, what now appears desecration was in all likelihood a necessary accompaniment to the acceptance of Shakespeare within an Enlightenment culture whose citizens were enamoured of their own unique sensibility and only prepared to accept the past on their own terms. The rise of Shakespeare’s posterior reputation, rather than being an inevitable consequence of qualities manifest in the works themselves, can more reasonably be ascribed to the discursive investment of various interpretive communities who initially sought through the re-authoring of Shakespeare’s plays, the fulfilment of disparate aims. Dobson anatomizes such pragmatic underpinnings, highlighting the ways that appropriation of the playwright functioned in such contexts, to the extent that at times this kind of agenda “was far more closely associated with excluded, radical pressure groups than with the Establishment” (12). This story of how Shakespeare became central to a burgeoning sense of English nationhood also points to what Altman observes as a key aspect of the process “by which genres and nations alike are established and modified”. Referred to as “[t]he recurrent process of folding the margins into the centre” (206), it underscores the fact that, however stable in appearance a centre may be, continual change is the reality.

In any discussion of early modern playwriting, received notions of creative autonomy must be qualified. While the Shakespeare of popular imagination draws on a post-Romantic view of authorship, the vision of a solitary artist whose detachment from the world functions as a source of inspiration sits incongruously within the context of Renaissance dramatic production. Of course, the death of the author as posited by post-structuralist critics such as Barthes and Foucault has played a useful role in countering long-held but essentially untenable ideas of authorial sovereignty. In turn, however, post-structuralist tenets must themselves be qualified for, as Michael D. Bristol observes, “[t]o believe literally the claim that works are produced by discursive formations isn’t really much different from believing literally in the inspiration of a muse” (53). In any case, for early modern playwrights, at least for those who wished to emphasize their role in the creation of a literary text, there were obstacles more material in nature. For one thing, the collaborative nature of early modern drama rendered routine the omission of playwrights’ names from the title-pages of playbooks, and the conventions enabling even straightforward ascriptions of authorship were not yet in place. Operating within such a collaborative environment, the playwright has

been called “a curiously shadowy figure” who was not even “at the centre of the collaboration” (Orgel, *Authentic 2*, 1). While no doubt hyperbolic, the claim draws attention to the impact of collaboration within early modern dramatic production, a feature so pronounced that “the very notion of an original script that was the author’s alone may be seriously misleading” (Bevington, *Troilus* 407). The work of a scholar like Grace Ioppolo, whose privileging of manuscripts is based on this idea of “an original script that was the author’s”, represents the other pole in this debate. Resurrecting the concept of authorial intentionality as key to the understanding of works, and consequently downplaying the role of the collaborative environment of the early modern theatre, her position has been aligned with new revisionism and characterized as “a conservative reaction against the death of the author” (Lesser 15). Avoiding the extremes of either position, it seems reasonable to concur with David Scott Kastan’s summation of the early modern playwright as “something more than a product of the text and something less than its exclusive producer” (*Shakespeare After Theory*, 38). In the field of early modern drama, then, there are ongoing attempts to navigate around “an author-centric bias which is now looking distinctly dated” (McInnis and Steggle 6). Rather than aligning these attempts with “the death of the author”, it is more appropriate to understand them as modifications on “the figure of the author [who] has been elasticized somewhat so as to take into account the theatrical and social influences that helped to shape the theatrical artefact” (McDonald, *Art* 4). Because of the dialectical relationship between material conditions and authorship in the early modern period, research into the material aspects obtaining in the period inevitably contributes to a reconsideration of the assumptions underlying the former author-centric bias.

The findings of a number of recent scholars locate in specific terms how the collaborative nature of Renaissance drama and the material conditions of its production preclude the consideration of any dramatist in isolation. Paying attention to these material conditions, scholars in repertory studies have assigned cultural agency beyond the playwright to a “company’s shareholders, licenser, patrons, actors and audience” (Munro 165). Additionally, Knutson’s work on the early modern repertory questions the critical practices which attribute the success of Shakespeare’s company, the Chamberlain’s and later King’s Men, to their most famous dramatist. Simply put, reliance on the output of a single dramatist – no matter how outstanding – would have been commercially untenable for any playhouse operating within a repertory system. A

similarly nuanced understanding of the period's conceptualization of the author is gained through a consideration of the document-related approach of Tiffany Stern. Stern has shown that, when considered as textual artefacts within their material context, plays are best understood as "assemblages of different parts – prologues, epilogues, songs, letters, actors' speeches – rather than as consistent, tightly unified 'whole' texts" (*Shakespeare* 160). Consonant with this revised understanding of the textual artefact, Stern notes that "the play in whatever form it reached the playhouse was either already a collection of scattered papers, or quickly became one", and that in certain instances, the traces of collaboration are so marked as to compromise conveyance of a unified poetic logic (*Documents* 3). Taking into consideration the alterations made to plays over the course of long theatre runs, as well as the different forms that plays took when performed by touring repertories, Stern emphasizes the dynamism that was an inherent feature of early modern dramatic production. Indeed, this dynamism was not confined to the text's originating theatrical environment. Stern notes that "alteration was a prized quality" (*Shakespeare* 3), conspicuously promoted because of the appeal it held for playgoers and readers, and consequently even within the printing house there existed the potential for interventions, intentional and otherwise, by scribes, prompters, compositors, and publishers. In drawing attention to such conditions, Stern's account enables qualification of received notions of authorial autonomy which are anachronous when applied to the early modern era.

This reassessment of the significance ascribed the figure of the early modern playwright in turn opens a space where the contributions of other agents can be given renewed attention. Scholars within New Textualism have reconsidered the role of early modern stationers and concentrated on the significance of the publisher in shaping the playbook as a commodity. In doing so, these scholars have been able to attain a more accurate perspective on the key agents involved in the production of playbooks within the era. As Straznicky puts it, to recognize "stationers as 'readers' as well as tradesmen is to foreground their cultural agency" and this in itself represents a rejection of Alfred Pollard's once widely held characterization of Shakespeare's stationers as "thieving, small-time capitalists" (4, 3). But construing stationers as readers also opens a portal onto the reception of early modern texts because, as Zachary Lesser puts it, "[a] publisher's job is not just to read texts but to predict how others will read them" (8). New Textualism's emphasis on the role of the publisher, then, suggests the possibility of

an affinity with Jauss's "aesthetics of reception", in particular with the claim that it is worthwhile to view "literature from the perspective of the reader or consumer" (Holub 57). In highlighting the extent to which early modern play texts are marked by traces of non-authorial mediation, New Textualists place their emphasis on "the play as a commodity within the book trade" (Lesser 17). Consistent with this reorientation, Lesser prefers to emphasize the term "book" rather than "document" in order to make clear a new concern with the playbook as a commodity (16).

The desire to repurpose texts was not limited to those who were involved in their actual production. The work of Jeffrey Todd Knight has highlighted a further dimension of the early modern print era that challenges modern suppositions of how playbooks were perceived upon their publication. In examining the phenomenon of the *sammelbande*, the name given to multibook collections compiled by readers in the Renaissance, Knight shows that readers resituated texts to suit their own desires, and in doing so participated in "a central aspect of literate culture that in later centuries would become the province solely of producers" (4-5). While such practices were enabled by the physical form of the early modern playbook, most conspicuously by the fact that these publications were typically sold without cloth bindings, in aesthetic terms they function as a representation of the reading positions that early modern readers brought to dramatic works. The author may appear an obvious organizing principle for the modern reader but this was far from true for those who compiled their own anthologies of printed matter. Consistent with a different approach to texts fostered by a pedagogical tradition of commonplacing, the practice of anthologizing offered readers the freedom of customizing reading matter according to personal interest. One of only two extant copies of Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*, bound in *sammelbande* by a German legal counsellor in the early seventeenth century, provides an example of how this process can encourage "an altered sense of the play's possible meanings". Viewed within the context of two non-dramatic texts dealing with the subject of heresy, what is potentially produced is "a new Marlowe play: *Edward II* as a theological-judicial text" (Masten, "Bound" 18, 19). In this way, examining the different contexts within which early modern playbooks were placed can yield further evidence of how a text's reception was subject to forces beyond an author's control.

The work of these scholars draws attention to how the material conditions of early modern dramatic production shaped the aesthetic consideration of the work, and how

these conditions also informed conceptions of the author. In an era that did not yet recognize the creator's copyright, what appear as idiosyncratic practices – such as the way works could be amended without the original creator's permission – were for the most part simply accepted ways of working. The notion of authorship is significant because, although it may not always be stated explicitly, the various methodologies used to engage with the early modern period inevitably adopt a particular stance towards it. Thus, while this thesis is concerned with the significance of genre for those involved in early modern dramatic production, authorship is nonetheless implicated. It is also because “the [classificatory] judgement . . . is as much pragmatic as it is conceptual” (Frow, *Genre* 54), that consideration of the material conditions informing the genre designations conceived by early modern stakeholders is crucial.

### **Early Modern Conceptions of Genre**

The fluidity which these commentators note as integral to genre is demonstrated by the range of classifications with which a single text may be aligned – a phenomenon that, as the titlepages of playbooks attest, was especially pronounced in the early modern period. But while shifting classifications may reflect the flux of an emerging dramatic artform and the number of interested stakeholders that it was attracting, there is also the suggestion that early modern audiences placed less weight on generic designations, that they were less inclined to consider them a form of inscription, and correspondingly more able to accept that a single text might garner more than one designation. In what may serve as an emblematic example, G. K. Hunter notes of *Pericles* that “it is only in the twentieth century that critics [took] to arguing its genre – but the popularity of the play in its own age tells us that contemporaries did not find generic indeterminacy a bar to popular esteem” (*Drama* 503). Of course, the concept of generic indeterminacy itself requires interrogation because, given that it is impossible to fully recreate the reading position held by the play's Jacobean audience, it is impossible to conclude that the play was perceived as generically indeterminate. But however plays were received, it can be accepted that just as the commercial motivations of stationers often determined the designations that appeared on early modern titlepages, the designations that are applied (or which fail to be applied) to these plays today are underwritten by similarly pragmatic motivations. The existence of such motivations,

however, does not invalidate the genre designations themselves. Indeed, as Altman has shown, genre is the product of such motivations.

If the matter of use can determine the very designation applied to a play, an emblematic example is provided by the Induction of the anonymous *A Warning for Fair Women* (1597). Consistent with this conception of genre as a dynamic process, Hunter has observed “the facility with which the dramatists of the time could switch the same material from genre to genre” (*Drama* 314), and the teasing game of classification that is *A Warning for Fair Women*’s opening conceit gestures towards this facility. In many ways, the Induction constitutes a self-conscious reflection on the conception of genre in the early modern period. When the dramatic genres of history, tragedy, and comedy appear, personified on stage, and whimsically vie for the right to present the play, it is Lady Tragedie who wins the dispute, affirming the play’s status as a generic construct in the process. But as the other genres depart the stage and Hystorie comments, “Looke Comedie, I markt it not till now, / The stage is hung with blacke” (Cannon 81-2), what is implied is the arbitrariness of the play’s generic designation, and what is exposed – albeit facetiously – is the ease with which the same material could be reconfigured to suit different generic ends. Given that the play does contain historical, tragic, and comic elements, “[t]he distinction at issue does not appear . . . as one of form but of rhetorical focus” (Hunter, “Genres” 250). The question that Comedie, Tragedie, and Hystorie attempt to settle is “what kind of thing is this play?” and this, they understand, will be determined by its use. The debate, therefore, is not about qualities intrinsic to the play but about how the same play can be transformed to meet different purposes.

Like any commercial environment, the world of early modern dramatic production invited a number of different stakeholders and the competing voices within the prologue of *A Warning for Fair Women* demonstrate this in epitome. Those involved in the production of these plays – the companies, playwrights, and stationers – each attempted to influence reception. Because, as Altman has observed, “[g]enres are not inert categories shared by all . . . but discursive claims made by real speakers for particular purposes in specific situations” (101), the ways in which these stakeholders deployed genre can provide an index to the different positions they occupy. The nascent state of the vernacular drama in this period provides an opportunity to observe the discursive investment that is more typically obscured where broader agreement between stakeholders prevails. At this early stage, what Stanley Fish would refer to as

an “interpretive community” (“Interpreting” 483), had not yet emerged. Critics, companies, playwrights, and stationers each represented discrete positions.

In the Induction to *A Warning for Fair Women*, the persistence of the classical notion of separation is suggested by the surprise inherent in Comedie’s question, “what all three met at once?” (28), but it is apparent that this dictum regarding the separation of genres now exists alongside new commercial pressures. As Comedie puts it, Tragedie may prevail for a day, “But once a week if we do not appeere, / She shall find few that will attend her heere” (37-8). It is significant that what is lauded in such exchanges is not the creative capacity of the anonymous writer. Rather, it is the processes which enable the work to be recognized which are foregrounded. In other words, it is the generic presuppositions of Renaissance writers committed to a production-oriented view of genre that are made clear. In an era before the figure of the author assumed its commanding power, genre is invoked as something akin to a recognizable brand-name which has the power to attract audiences. Douglas Lanier notes that “[l]ike an author’s name, a brand is a sign that is instantly recognizable, distinctive, transferrable (that is, capable of being attached to an array of products), and powerful and productive in its connotations” (93). Comedie’s observation suggests that within a commercial repertory, variety is understood as being one of the keys to success. Tragedie will only concede that Comedie has “Some odde ends of old jeasts scrap’t together, / To tickle shallow injudicial eares” (40-1). Alluding to a hierarchy of genres, Tragedie privileges its own subject matter – “passions that must move the soule” – over Comedie’s purview of the “slight and childish” (44/42). The final jest from Tragedie – “T’is you have kept the Theatres so long, / Painted in play-bills, upon every poast” – aligns both Comedie and Hystorie with the new commercial impulses that threaten Tragedie’s once unassailable status as “Queene / In great *Apollos* name and all the *Muses*” (77-8). This complaint ironically draws attention to the play’s own status as a commercial property intended for performance on a public theatre stage. In a sense, the very issue of company ownership seems to underpin the Induction. The genres here represented would be adopted by the 1623 folio edition of Shakespeare’s works and, given the association between the Chamberlain’s and later King’s Men and history plays, the tripartite arrangement memorialized through the First Folio could be taken as expressive of a company brand. The capacity of a text’s genre to be repurposed, a capacity that is made explicit in the prologue to *A Warning for Fair Women*, is key to understanding genre’s

usefulness to the various stakeholders involved in the production and reception of early modern drama. In asserting their own interests, the critics, companies, playwrights and stationers sought to affect the reading positions by which early modern texts were received. As they did so, each of these stakeholders operated according to a different conception of genre, and sought to influence a different interpretive community.

If the opening of *A Warning for Fair Women* points to the genre consciousness that was prevalent in the era, it also functions as an acknowledgment of what Adena Rosmarin terms “the power of genre”. Building on Gombrich’s emphasis on the schema as a starting point for artistic creation, Rosmarin notes the “constitutive power” that resides in genre and how this enables engagement with the text to proceed upon deductive or rhetorical grounds (14). Thus, with a putative genre designation as a starting point, a reader will adjust or correct the text’s particulars so that they “fit” the relevant schema. This conception of genre as a schematic starting place is helpful in understanding how the various reading positions that users bring to texts can form the basis of meaning-making. Through the deployment of particular conventions, a larger genre-specific frame of reference is able to be invoked. Thus, the mere fact of a stage being hung with black is sufficient to mobilize expectations of a specific diegetic world and the imaginative capacities of the audience will engender the creation of this world. Consequently, while it may appear that engagement with the text is intuitive, genres function as strategic interventions (Rosmarin 11). In drawing on the power of genre to both mobilize and transform expectations, the activities of those involved in the production of early modern drama represent one pole of a much broader debate. This debate is not specific to any period but, as Altman has usefully shown, is intrinsic to the ongoing processes that determine language and culture. As Altman puts it, if there is acceptance at one end of the spectrum of the notion that things are “both permanently defined and unaffected by use, the opposite pole is . . . asking for a performative response where use dictates label and definition rather than vice versa” (101). When this debate is situated within the context of early modern approaches to genre, it is possible to align the latter position with the producers who are responding to a consumer culture, and the former with the classically informed stance of a critic like Philip Sidney. Conceived in more theoretical terms, the actions of the producers are akin to the twentieth century post-structuralists whose work represents, in Jonathan Culler’s summation, “the critique of the systematizing ambitions of structuralism” (viii). Rather

than accepting inherited notions and working within established definitions, the producers of drama in the early modern period, responding to the demands of a new environment, set about determining for themselves the most appropriate ways to use available genre categories.

### **The Stakeholders: Critics, Playwrights, Playing Companies, and Stationers**

If, as Altman observes, the language of criticism informs the way a medium is spoken of and hence conceived, then Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry* can be understood as an intervention vying for control of the discourse through which vernacular drama is discussed. Appearing in manuscript when English vernacular drama was still at a nascent stage of development, its prescriptivist orientation and recommendation of received models signals its participation in a classical model of genre that would increasingly be challenged by the more commercial practices of the repertory companies. Given that the first permanent playhouse had only been established in 1576, the date of the *Apology's* composition (around 1580) suggests that the genre practices of the theatres were already provoking commentary from critics with neo-classical sympathies. The appearance of Sidney's *Apology* in manuscript, therefore, registers an early moment of opposition to new ways of using genre, and suggests that the discursive investments of stakeholders were already becoming apparent. Sidney's stance adheres to "the neoclassic critics' version of decorum as it was being formulated by the contemporary Continental commentators on Aristotle's *Poetics*", and it is in thrall to the idea of "correct" models and rules (Bateson and Meserole 46). It is a stance which is also informed by Renaissance assumptions about the conjoined nature of poetics and rhetoric, a partnering which results in a perception of drama as a form of rhetoric whose function is to persuade. This conjoining of a system emphasizing "appropriate models for textual production" (Altman 15) with one that is primarily concerned with matters of reception, in turn has implications for the conception of genre. The title-page of Thomas Preston's *Cambyzes* (1570), for example, suggests its commitment to the moral improvement of the audience by announcing "A lamentable tragedy mixed full of pleasant mirth". The public theatres, however, would ultimately have more mundane concerns than the audience's moral welfare. The drama produced by the public theatres, commercial enterprises happy to ignore the pronouncements of critics, was to be less overtly didactic in nature. Beholden more to the whims of audiences, the preservation

of inherited classical models of genre was not a great concern for the companies competing within this medium. What emerged instead were works of *genera mista* (Imbrie 68), the recombinant forms so characteristic of Renaissance dramatic practice. A model of genre predicated on a perception of the audience as passive recipients was thus increasingly compromised by a consumer model which endowed that same audience with agency. A contest over two conceptions of genre - one tied to classical precedents, the other fluid and responsive to market pressure - thus emerged.

It is in the years between 1607 and 1610 that the changes wrought by the consumer model of genre become especially apparent. With the emergence of plays written in collaboration by Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, the vogue for Romance on the stage is swiftly reimagined as tragicomedy, and generic experimentation leads to a distinct trend. But generic experimentation also makes the precarious nature of writing for the stage apparent, and both Beaumont and Fletcher endure failure with new plays written outside of their partnership. These failures on the public stage expose the very complicated relationship which playwrights had with genre. While playwrights were a part of the same commercial environment as other dramatic stakeholders, their conception of genre was informed by more patently aesthetic considerations. This is made clear by the prologues and Inductions of the early modern period, to the extent that it has been claimed that “one could construct a contemporary understanding of genre based solely on playwrights’ prefatory material” (Bergeron 105). To make use of the terminology Altman applies to those involved in Hollywood film-making, it is conceivable that early modern playwrights who prided themselves on being up-to-the-minute could see “generic identification as a synonym of out-of-date, oversimplified and ossified production” (113). The Induction to Ben Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) makes it clear that, only a generation after they first appeared, both *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus* - works now considered examples of Renaissance revenge tragedy - were paradigmatic examples of a superannuated kind of play. Jonson critiques the persistent appeal of such plays through the figure of a theatre patron whose judgement, as if preserved in aspic, “hath stood still these five and twenty, or thirty years” (*Bartholomew Fair* 0. 280). Calcified tradition and entrenched popular taste are thus positioned as antithetical to the dynamic nature of the genre process from which plays such as *Bartholomew Fair* are continually arising. The references Jonson makes to the old tragedies by Kyd and Shakespeare prove that the features of these

plays which contemporaries thought worthy of emulation had become, to borrow Altman's phrase, "consecrated by formulaic production" (177). From the perspective of Jonson as a theatre practitioner – and one not known for pandering to popular taste (Barish 136) – whatever freshness these plays had once displayed is long staled. Genre labels can thus "become pejorative terms" and "lose the specificity of their reference in favour of a 'generic' negativity" (Altman 113). Jonson, in order to underscore those qualities that make his own drama innovative, uses his prologue to denounce the topoi and characteristic postures associated with other older and well-known genres. Jonson was certainly not the only playwright of the period to invoke genre in this way. The prologue penned for *The Faithful Shepherdess* (1609) makes clear Fletcher's disdain for the conventions associated with a tired English pastoral tradition. The tension between genre conceived as a constraint and as an enabler of creativity is apparent in these examples. Recognizing that genre is an important way of reassuring an audience that a play will conform to type, the author must simultaneously arouse expectations that it is nonetheless capable of providing novelty. This tension again underscores the flexibility of genre and the usefulness of the concept to a range of stakeholders.

The question of genre's usefulness to early modern theatre companies is complicated by the fact that genre is a shared property. Its value within a commercial marketplace where the desire for individuation has to be assumed would therefore conceivably be diminished. At the same time, however, generic affiliation can function as "a discursive strategy for gaining access to competitors' pre-sold audiences" (Altman 120). Theatre managers or company shareholders will by necessity conceive of genre from a commercial perspective but, as producers, their decisions will play an important role in genre formation and inevitably have an effect on the aesthetic realm. A desire to capitalize on the reasons for a play's success – even if the play in question is the property of a rival company – will encourage an anatomizing approach. Here, a pragmatic dimension asserts itself because conditions specific to each company will determine how successfully a given play can be replicated. Repertory size as well as the individual talents of actors are likely to be of significance in this regard. The desire of company shareholders, as agents involved in production, to replicate the success of individual plays may very well affect the processes of genre formation. If certain textual or thematic features are privileged, and if other producers agree with the reading position that emerges, what occurs is the industry-wide perpetuation of a number of

successful elements that together are recognized as a genre. What begins in a contest between these users to determine the features integral to commercial success can therefore be understood as intrinsic to the development of the Renaissance genres. The emergence of the Elizabethan history genre within the repertory of the Queen's Men, and its subsequent development by the Chamberlain's Men, can be accommodated to this narrative, as can the development of tragicomedy by the King's Men. The fact that these genres are identified with specific companies also underscores the restrictions which material circumstances placed on the capacity of repertories to engage with the work of their rivals.

Another group of stakeholders, the early modern stationers, are especially significant in respect to the influence which their practices had on processes of genre formation. For this group, the repurposing of a text's genre – either implicitly through the use of typographical and bibliographical conventions or explicitly through designation – was a deliberate strategy and one which was integral to their enterprise. But because this strategy ostensibly served a commercial end, its semiotic force is often overlooked. It has been observed that “[i]t is a truism to say that a play printed on the page is not the same as a play in performance. What is less often considered is that one version of a play in performance is different from others” (Stern, *Making Shakespeare* 1). Equally, however, it can be argued that one version of a play in print is different from others, and that “the same play may carry radically different meanings and politics . . . even between two otherwise-identical printed editions brought out by two different publishers” (Lesser 21). Furthermore, the example furnished by the publishers Richard Bonian and Henry Walley through their treatment of *Troilus and Cressida* would suggest that there exists another possibility: even an otherwise-identical edition by the same publishers can, through the manipulation of genre, be conceived in different terms. It is true that this interest in the power of genre originated within the context of the broader commercial environment the publishers inhabited. But the force of the strategies they developed went beyond these originating circumstances which were, as several scholars have noted, fairly quotidian in nature. As Laurie Maguire notes, “[t]hen, as now, businesses thrived in colonies of competitors, the geographical concentration of specialists drawing custom to the area” (434). In early modern London, it was the area around St Paul's Cathedral that most conspicuously represented an example of cluster marketing for the book trade. Accordingly, the activities of the stationers can be situated

within what has been termed “the very moment that meaning itself was becoming marketable” (Agnew 12). Within the print world, one means of specialization was afforded by the different tastes which the purchasers of books displayed and the concept of genre was instrumental in aligning texts with readers. The practice of marketing, of course, assigns individuals to groups on the basis of their buying habits, and, given that stationers were essentially concerned with matters of categorization, the usefulness of genre is almost axiomatic. Genre always subtends some form of audience and so it is also helpful as a way of theorizing the audiences for early modern plays, something which is especially important given that these audiences cannot be reconstructed otherwise.

Just as Philip Sidney’s desire was to establish the conditions wherein vernacular playwrighting could be recognized for its literary worth, the desire of early modern stationers was that playbooks be considered valid print commodities. Playwrights such as Ben Jonson, however, noted that with commercialization came a countervailing tendency. That is, as the Induction to *Bartholomew Fair* makes clear, in this new capitalist age a theatre-goer’s right to admission was akin to a right to censure. In mock legal discourse, Jonson notes that “It shall be lawful for any man to judge his sixpenn’orth, his tweldepenn’orth, so to his eighteen pence, two shillings, half a crown, to the value of his place – provided always his place get not above his wit” (Creaser, *CWBJ* 4. 280). Jonson here may have been ruefully remembering the fate of his own *Sejanus* or John Fletcher’s *Faithful Shepherdess* which, as his dedicatory verse for the first edition of that play made clear, was damned by “The wise and many-headed bench”, which included “the shop’s foreman, or such brave spark, / That may judge for his sixpence” (*CWBJ* 3.372). If Jonson ranks the theatre audience into identifiable social groups on the basis of their ticket-purchasing power, stationers would at times attempt something comparable by categorizing imagined readers on the basis of their social standing. Encouraging a disregard for the hegemonic appeal of the theatre in order to underscore the more select appeal of the print medium, stationers accordingly sought to establish a perception of playbooks as literary artefacts worthy of commodification. Since playbook purchasers were a small community relative to playgoers, genre was important to stationers as a way of redefining plays for a new audience. Invoking a readership of like-minded individuals distinct from the audiences who attended plays, stationers could use genre as a tool to engender a purchaser’s self-conscious

identification with a largely symbolic community. The examples of Bonian and Walley's *Troilus and Cressida* and Richard Jones's *Tamburlaine*, demonstrate that various strategies were available to enable this redefinition.

Alastair Fowler notes that of all the processes determining the literary canon, "genre is surely among the most decisive" ("Genre" 100), and the desire to have plays perceived as lasting works of literature rather than ephemeral pieces of entertainment written for the London stage informs two of the era's most famous publications of dramatic works, the Jonson and Shakespeare Folios. The way genre is used within both publications suggests something common to the era: how early modern title-pages would "use generic terms to make plays appear to be of lasting importance" (Berek 160). It might be said that, by virtue of the book's permanence, the classical model of genre is reinscribed by both these publications. While the sheer number of stakeholders involved in bringing an edition like Shakespeare's First Folio to press can make it difficult to ascribe agency, its publication in 1623 was preceded by the 1616 folio edition of the plays of Ben Jonson, a venture overseen by the playwright himself, which in many ways was the prototype for the later work. Although it may not have been the concern or intention of every stakeholder involved in these publications, the folio format can undoubtedly be understood as instrumental to a process of canonization. The way genre is invoked within these publications functions to draw a point of distinction between the works of these writers and their contemporaries.

Frow observes that "texts do not simply have uses which are mapped out in advance by the genre: they are themselves *uses of genre*, performances of or allusions to the norms and conventions which form them and which they may, in turn, transform" (*Genre* 25). Purportedly similar texts which can be grouped together under the one generic classification may therefore display as many differences as similarities. Each text, while observing some conventions, will ignore or subvert others and, as a consequence, will represent a different "use" of genre. Classification, then, will become a matter of privileging certain conventions, and different interpretive communities will respond to the text in various ways. What is implicated here is the social nature of semiosis or, as Ross Chambers avers in another context: "the significance of the story is determined less by its actual content than by . . . the relationships mediated by the act of narration" (3). As Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia would have it, "the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language . . . but rather it exists in other

people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions" (Bakhtin, 294). Because within a given historical setting texts "talk to each other" (Frow, *Genre* 24), consideration of the relationships within which a text is embedded is crucial to an understanding of both genre and text. For the genre-users of the early modern period, control of these relationships was crucial in determining the way a text was perceived.

Citing the large body of scholarship dedicated to Shakespeare's afterlife, Dobson observes that most "treatments of the subject agree that the history of Shakespeare's changing significance for periods subsequent to his own is a history of different 'appropriations'" (11). I argue more generally that the same forces of "multiplicity and contestation" that Dobson recognizes as key to Shakespeare's posthumous life (12) are also inherent within the early modern period. It is because "genres must be seen as a site of struggle among users" (Altman 99), that the narrative of appropriation outlined in Dobson's account is a useful way of understanding the actions of the various stakeholders participating in the production and consumption of plays in the period. Because genre is a form that enables textual organization, and because the manner of this textual organization is dependent upon discursive goals, struggle is an inevitable consequence. Various stakeholders will attempt to situate the text in a way that is most advantageous to their own interests. Privileging a particular textual feature, for example, may lead to the text's identification with an already established corpus and this in turn will affect its reception. Textual organization is not a given but something that can be altered, and evidence for the truth of this statement can be found in a review of almost any text's genre history. Accordingly, genre can be understood as a product of discourse rather than an inherent quality of texts, and different agents will invoke a designation on the basis of whether a particular mode of textual organization fits their purposes.

The multiple uses to which genres were put in the early modern period suggest that a variety of users were involved in a continual process of redefining texts so as to suit their own needs and institutional requirements. Thus, rather than perceiving genres as universal or timeless categories, what needs to be investigated are the different ways in which the concept of genre and generic labels themselves are invoked by the critics, playwrights, companies, and stationers, of the early modern period. Each of these users of genre is concerned with addressing a specific audience from a specific position for a specific purpose. Understanding the different ways that genre was perceived within

these situations is key to an appreciation of how the concept was able to function in a variety of ways. Rather than attempting to reconcile the apparent contradictions arising from the variety of labels attached to a text, it is more important to see these as evidence of the different genre practices of different users. In fact, it is in such instances that discursive investment, so often elided, is most apparent (Altman 111).

Furthermore, the conceptualization of genres, especially when aligned with institutional interests, can have significant material ramifications. Various stakeholders thus attempted to protect and further their interests by attempting to gain a measure of control over this ostensibly abstract realm. The contests brought about by the various discursive investments of stakeholders, and how these both reflected and affected early modern perceptions of drama, are my subject.

## Chapter One – The Critics

Writing his *Apology for Poetry* (1580, printed 1595) at the moment that a new form of drama was emerging, Philip Sidney makes his reverence for inherited notions of literature clear, imagining a vernacular drama which honours classical tradition and which is guided in its practice by the “pure” genres of antiquity. The antithesis of this practice is represented by the mixed genres of the public stage which earn Sidney’s scorn. In order to explore the nature of Sidney’s objection, in this chapter I borrow Adena Rosmarin’s assertion that “[g]enre is not, as commonly thought, a class but, rather, a classifying statement” and that therefore “genre is most usefully defined as a tool of critical explanation” (46). This way of understanding shifts the emphasis onto Sidney himself and the values he was attempting to uphold when, in criticizing the public theatres, he made genre his point of contention. In the context of the *Apology*, adopting Rosmarin’s formulation enables Sidney’s critical construction of genre to function as an explanation for what he believed to be at stake.

The broad contention of this thesis is that the instability that marked genre in the early modern period is a consequence of the different uses to which it was put by a variety of stakeholders. Rick Altman observes that genre fulfils both an ideological and ritual function (188), and this distinction is helpful in understanding its uses for these different stakeholders. Conceived in ideological terms, genres work alongside the other “symbolic and representational systems” produced by “governments and industries” (Altman 26). According to this theory, texts function as “the vehicle for a government’s address to its citizens/subjects or an industry’s appeal to its clients” (Altman 27), and the solutions which these texts offer are therefore geared towards the interests of those in power. If transposed to an early modern context, this theory could allow the theatre to be understood as an artform with an unequivocally Royalist mandate. Patrons such as the Lord Chamberlain, censors such as the Master of the Revels, and playing companies such as the Queen’s Men can be understood first and foremost as representing the interests of those in power. This approach engenders appreciation of the ideological investment which early modern rulers had in the theatre, and Philip Sidney’s interest in genre can be understood by way of this as implicitly ideological.

Sidney’s stance on genre, in particular his allegiance to the classical unities and to the notion of decorum, is not indicative of a position widely-held by early modern stakeholders. In reference to Sidney’s comments on *Gorboduc*, for example, it has been

noted that “[s]uch views . . . hardly seem to be representative of wider contemporary attitudes towards tragedy” (Cadman et al, “Introduction” 3). More complex understandings of genre might act as a corrective to Sidney’s position and, for this reason, it is important to also consider views that oppose Sidney’s. The ritual view of genre, for example, offers an alternative approach which allows the interests of a different group of stakeholders to be represented. This conception of genres indicates that genre formation, rather than being imposed or regulated, occurs as a consequence of audience practices. As public theatres emerged in early modern London, the interests of different stakeholders and the instability inherent in the early modern period increasingly placed constraints on the capacity of genre to function as an ideological tool. Derek Dunne, for example, has contended that a genre like revenge tragedy is marked by “socio-political critique” and an “oppositional attitude” (132, 143), noting in reference to the plots of many of these plays that “group action against a head of state is unmistakably radical” (137). The public theatre, a commercial institution, could hardly afford to ignore the tastes displayed by the audiences who paid money to attend plays. This meant that, as genre’s ritual function began to assume prominence, there was a corresponding diminution of its capacity to function ideologically. For Sidney and others like him, this was a source of concern.

This broader context is important because Sidney’s famous objection to the public stage “mingling kings and clowns” would be easy to dismiss as the gripe of a pedant. Much like Polonius’s infamous catalogue of genres, it seems to be more an index of the speaker’s pedantry and prejudices rather than an accurate reflection of a shared reality. The complaint appears so emblematic of the author’s neo-classical sympathies that, while it is well-remembered and often cited, it does not appear to warrant sustained enquiry. As a corrective, placing the comment within a broader context of genre contestation helps to foreground its proper significance. It has been observed that, in the Renaissance, genres were “widely thought to be fixed literary types somewhat like species in the biological order of nature” (Abrams and Harpham 148). Many of the stakeholders considered in this thesis, however, used genre in ways that suggest they did not consider the literary kinds to be fixed and stable. Nevertheless, it is certainly important to note that Sidney drew on this biological metaphor and spoke of genre by way of language more common to the discussion of species within the natural world. Because a form of ranking was inherent within this other system, the entailment to this

metaphor was that “genres were also commonly ranked in a hierarchy (related to the ranking of social classes, from royalty and the nobility down to peasants)” (Abrams, *Glossary* 148-9). Although genre theorists have found aspects of the biological analogy a useful heuristic, it is obviously far from a totalizing explanation of how genres work. David Fishelov, in his study of the metaphors commonly applied to genre, has observed an important caveat with regard to this idea of genre as biological species: “in culture . . . the forces that select are guided (unlike in nature) by value systems” (36). The value system of most significance for an aristocrat like Sidney was that of decorum.

Sidney begins the *Apology* by noting the circumstances which have led to its composition: “I . . . in these my not old years and idlest times having slipped into the title of poet, am provoked to say something unto you in the defence of that my unelected vocation (81). If Sidney is to be taken at his word, at this juncture he is beleaguered by the denial of the purpose which had traditionally imbued the aristocrat’s role with meaning. The aristocrat’s provision of military service to the ruling monarch had long ensured the class a place in national affairs, but the status of the aristocracy was now being revised as the feudal system became consigned to history. As the opportunity to participate meaningfully in national affairs dwindled, a situation which was only exacerbated by the pacifist policies of Elizabeth I, aristocrats naturally sought out other points of distinction for themselves. In these circumstances, the belief that virtue was the sole preserve of the nobility gained a new emphasis, and Sidney’s concern with decorum can be understood as a consequence of this. Matters of representation were at stake, as was the idea that the theatres should, by observing decorum, represent the ideological investments of the aristocracy.

If decorum in the social world dictated that there be no mingling between classes, the corollary was that the order of genres within an assigned hierarchy must remain stable. This meant that, at least in theory, genres should not be mixed with other genres. Ideally the theatres would, by observing the decorum inherent within the hierarchy of genres, represent the ideological investment of the aristocracy. The mingling of kings and clowns, which suggested a crossover between tragedy and comedy, was therefore a significant point of contention for Sidney when he considered the drama of the public theatres. A desire to protect the established hierarchical order of the genre system produced attempts to regulate the messy reality of how genres actually emerged and were instantiated. *An Apology for Poetry* represents a serious attempt on Sidney’s part

to intervene in this process. In a work whose structure is indebted to conventions of classical oration, Sidney's objection to genre-mixing occurs within the "Digression", the part which R. W. Maslen terms "the core . . . its *raison d'être*" (33). The denunciation, in other words, represents more than a knee-jerk response to the new mixed forms then emerging from the public stages. Sidney's concern, I argue, can be traced to an institutional shift that was occurring by way of the genres of the public stage. The Theatre, London's first permanent playhouse (constructed in 1576), was situated well beyond the city's jurisdiction in the district of Shoreditch. This strategy, a way of avoiding the reach of London's Puritans, would be crucial to the development of the early modern theatre and the kinds of plays performed. Given that areas like Shoreditch were characterized by "immigrants, a range of trades, people of differing ages, and different degrees of affluence" (Crawforth et al 7-8), it is fitting that the early modern theatre was a place where members of all social classes could assemble. A new system of genre, one shaped by the tastes of consumers and articulated through the performance of new plays, was replacing a much older system grounded in classical theories of dramatic unity. This shift from a classical to a consumer model of genre was underway and, in the mixed genres of the public stage, I contend that Sidney had glimpsed evidence of it.

This shift represented a change to the rhetorical ends of genre and, given the status of rhetoric in early modern England, this had important implications. The received wisdom on the subject of rhetoric came by way of continental interpreters of Aristotle's *Poetics* and Horace's *Ars poetica* who, demonstrating "that familiar Renaissance ability to reconcile differing traditions", managed to weld the two works "into one essentially rhetorical construct" (Vickers, *Philosophy* 718, 717). Thus, with regard to poetics and rhetoric, Renaissance critics were guided by clear assumptions about the conjoined nature of the two disciplines. In this way, Aristotle's "concern with the autotelic work of art" was subordinated to Horatian didacticism and an overall design that took as its end the moral improvement of the audience (Vickers, *Philosophy* 718). As Stephen Orgel notes: "[i]t was generally assumed that drama was a form of rhetoric; imitation was its means, but its function was to persuade" ("Shakespeare" 152). A preoccupation with rhetoric, fostered by grammar school training and evident in popular handbooks on the subject, was a hallmark of the Elizabethan era.

It is not surprising that in a rhetorically conscious age, where “the idea of imitation as the following of the characteristic schemes and tropes of one textual model in particular” was in circulation (Hutson, *CWBJ* 488), there existed an attendant interest in genre. Sidney’s pronouncements are emblematic of his desire to ensure the right models of genre were in circulation and being imitated. But a new hierarchy of value was in the process of emerging and the aristocratic Sidney was at the losing end. *An Apology for Poetry*, penned and circulated in manuscript around 1580, is an intervention underpinned by this realization. John Frow has called genre “a shared convention with a social force” (*Genre* 102), and the mixed genres of the public stages signalled a shift in social relations as well as a concomitant shift in the institutions which underpinned them. As a corollary, standards of decorum that had been accepted were placed under new pressure, and sharp-eyed members of the aristocracy found this worrying. For Sidney, the *Apology* was part manifesto.

Sidney and the theatres were divided in that they held different conceptions of how genres should function. Contrasting assumptions informed their positions but I suggest that there were three main points of contention, all of which cohered around the issue of decorum. First, what purpose do genres ultimately fulfil; are they primarily concerned with entertainment or didacticism? Second, who bears the responsibility for decreeing on the matter of genre: is it the critic or someone else? Third, is it possible that some genres might be intrinsically more worthwhile than others? Sidney and the theatres were effectively polarized around these issues. For Sidney, genres performed a didactic role, they were largely unchanging and the relevant models were communicated directly from critic to author to audience. Genres existed within a pre-ordained hierarchical system, and consequently some – such as tragedy – were held to be of more value than others. These conditions were consistent with a neoclassical view of genre. Against this was the view of genre then emerging through the practice of the public theatres. Within this world, genres were for entertainment, not for the teaching of moral lessons. Their mode of representation was direct, and relied on the participation of the audience, not the pronouncement of the critic. No genre was intrinsically more worthwhile than any other but, within the shifting set of relations brought about by the repertory system, some held more value at particular moments because the commercial value of genres could wax and wane. This was what Lady Hystorie had meant when, in the Induction to *A Warning for Fair Women*, she asserted

her own worth alongside that of the classically endorsed Tragedie. The differences which Sidney and the theatres had over these points were not trivial. Rather, each of the points of contention was crucial because the audience's apprehension of "the-kind-of-thing-this-is" was at stake. What Sidney perceived as lapses in decorum, therefore, may not have been construed as such by the audiences attending the public theatres. This audience is unlikely to have shared, or even to have understood, Sidney's conception of decorum.

### **The Significance of the Genres of the Public Stage**

Implicit in the significance ascribed to drama in the early modern period is an awareness of genre's capacity to function as a form of what, after Kenneth Burke, has been termed symbolic action, an act of "signification which effects changes in its environment" (Frow, *Genre* 154). Typically, however, it was the theatre itself which bore the brunt of people's objections. The anti-theatricalists, for example, did not appear concerned over issues of genre. But although they did not couch their objection in these terms, it was this rhetorical capacity of stage plays, a capacity which is best understood as intrinsic to the way genre functions, that constituted the basis of their ire. The anxieties generated by drama in the early modern theatre are imbued with an awareness that the borders between the stage and the broader world cannot be controlled; it is, as Tony Bennett observes more generally, that genre may be "regarded both as the bearer of social relations within the text and as the route through which the text re-enters social relations via its influence on the reader" (80). City authorities were especially inclined to find fault with the drama of the day, seeing in any civic disturbance evidence of the theatre's insidious influence and, on occasion, campaigning to have theatres closed down. Even more extreme was the attempt by the Privy Council, in response to the politically incendiary play *The Isle of Dogs* (1597), to ban theatre altogether and have the playhouses dismantled (Donaldson, *Life* 115). At the core of their objections was the issue of mimesis for, as one group was to claim in a petition to the privy council, "[s]tage plays . . . are so set forth as they move wholly to imitation and not to the avoiding of those vices which they represent" (cited Helgerson 211). This was a crucial point for both proponents and detractors of the theatre. For these groups, the issue of whether it was the virtues or vices depicted on stage which most inspired emulation was a source of division, but both were united on the basic premise that the

stage was capable of moving its audience to imitation. Sidney, also in agreement on this point that the theatre as an art of mimesis encouraged imitation, had reason to attempt to dictate what was being represented.

Remembering that the institution of genre is always tied to more material institutions, the theatrical genres of the early modern period can be understood as very much a product of the market forces cohering at this particular historical moment. Altman notes that “like all critical constructs, genres are created and sustained by repeated use of generic terminology – not only as part of recognizable generic criticism, but also in ads, posters, labels, iconography, quotations and other intertextual references” (84). The “categories and terminology” used to describe various mediums are therefore a product not so much of the medium itself but of those who represent it (Altman 124). In this way, Sidney’s objection can be understood as part of a larger dispute over discourse and the power to control it. In reality, the invocations of genre made in the context of the vernacular theatre would carry a force that Sidney’s more theoretical position in the *Apology* would find hard to contest. The material nature of this new institution was at the time of Sidney’s writing already a force that could not be ignored.

### **Genre as Institution**

In England in the 1570s, plays were being performed for the first time in permanent playhouses. Throughout the 1580s, a generation of university-educated men – the University Wits – were dedicating their talents to writing for the stage, and professional actors were performing the new material being created. This represented a break with how plays had traditionally been performed, and it has been observed that “[p]ublic playing was transformed within the span of a decade and a half from an occasional form of recreation performed intermittently . . . to a regularly scheduled event in permanent playhouses” (White 138). This institutionalization of the theatre was occurring alongside that of the capitalist market, for the appearance of permanent playhouses bore a temporal proximity to the “construction of the Royal Exchange . . . in 1566-67” (Bruster, *Drama* 3-4). None of these changes, of course, was occurring in a vacuum. If new institutions were arising, it was only by way of encroachment upon ones older and more venerable, and the objection Sidney raises to the public theatres and their mixed genres is best understood through this context. At least nominally, the public theatres

were dependent on the aristocrats who acted as their patrons. But simply by being commercial enterprises, the playhouses “imaginatively abrogated the hierarchical system upon which traditional service depended” (Schalkwyk 9). This institutional volatility was the backdrop to the theatre’s establishment and, by way of the new mixed genres, that volatility was enshrined within the genre system itself.

The proto-capitalism that marked the historical moment in which these permanent playhouses were formed found further expression in the way the plays themselves were conceived by various stakeholders. In reference to Marx’s theorizing of market forces, Jones and Stallybrass note that “[c]apital needs to pursue profit and thus to detach itself from any particular object so as to transfer itself . . . from one style of object to another . . . as the market dictates” (8). The practitioners of plays themselves appear to have understood their profession in these terms with the Prologue for Middleton and Dekker’s *Roaring Girl* announcing that “tragic passion, / And such grave stuff, is this day out of fashion” (Knowles 227). As Jones and Stallybrass put it, “capitalism could, indeed, be defined as the mode of production which, in fetishizing the commodity, refuses to fetishize the object” (8). The attachment Sidney displays (in the *Apology*) to Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville’s *Gorboduc* (1562) – exemplified in his fear that “it might not remain an exact model of all tragedies” (110) – speaks to the opposite impulse: an attachment to a particular mode of representation regardless of commercial considerations. His grounding in manuscript culture, of course, speaks to the same underlying system of belief. What Sidney found objectionable about the new theatres lay in this critical distinction – the distance between his own aesthetic practice and the new commercial model that was emerging. At the same time, Sidney’s stance was inextricable from the threat he perceived this new system posing to an established social order and hierarchy. Within genre’s symbolic realm, this threat was manifest in the shift underway from a classical to a consumer model of genre which did not recognize the old hierarchy. As a consequence, the notion of decorum which was enshrined within the classical view of genre and so important to Sidney, was being lost.

Frow observes that genre “exists as a part of the relationship between texts and readers, and it has a systemic existence” (*Genre* 102). In the Elizabethan period, systemic shift was thus inevitable as the institutions and assumptions that had supported the classical system began to fall away. Although Sidney may have wished it otherwise, the new system of genre being inaugurated by the theatres was beyond the

ruling class's control, and certainly beyond any individual's control. Within the world of the theatre, a play like *Gorboduc* would not be awarded any special dispensation on the basis of its being a tragedy. In the theatres, there was no hierarchy of genre but only an ever-shifting set of relations whose ultimate arbiter was the marketplace. The Induction to *A Warning for Fair Women*, in suggesting the relational nature of the genre system that was privileged in the theatres, provides an apt illustration of the change that was incipient. The theatres were effectively in a dialogue with the audience, and plays were only apprehended alongside other plays.

### **The Problem of Decorum and the Contest over a Reading Position**

Genre mixing now carried new implications for the concept of decorum, and it was the institutional force behind the mixing which did not augur well for an embattled aristocrat like Sidney. Something had now changed. Elsewhere within the *Apology*, Sidney appears to have no problem with the practice of mixing genres, stating that "if severed they be good, the conjunction cannot be hurtful". The implication, as contended by Orgel, is that "the objection . . . is not to the mixing of genres, but to the failure to observe decorum" ("Introduction" 3). In this instance, the genres are a surrogate for Sidney's true concern.

In *I Henry IV*, Falstaff famously deconstructs the notion of honour. As he puts it, "What is honour? A word. What is in that word 'honour'? What is that 'honour'? Air. A trim reckoning!" (5.1.132-33). Falstaff's characteristically pragmatic conclusion is: "Therefore I'll none of it. Honour is a mere scutcheon; and so ends my catechism" (5.1.136-37). In observing that "honour" is simply a word, Falstaff refuses the metaphoric resonances upon which its power depends. Ever the cynic, Falstaff appears to glean that whatever meaning the term has attained is a consequence of others' pragmatically motivated ascriptions. The foundations upon which the term rests are therefore culturally derived and the result of casually accepted assumptions rather than carefully interrogated principles. Beyond the contrivances, there is little to move Falstaff or to determine his behaviour, and a refusal to adhere to the commonly held assumptions drains the concept of its artificially acquired force. Falstaff's position, however, potentially has a force of its own. For the sake of the English Royalists who in Shakespeare's play are battling Hotspur's rebels at the Battle of Shrewsbury, it is lucky that others arrayed on the King's side don't share Falstaff's opinion.

Decorum, another abstract concept, might have provoked a similarly gruff assessment from Falstaff. Like honour, the power that resides in decorum is metaphorical; its capacity to influence behaviour depends on complicity. The significance of the word's symbolic dimension underscores the different way that metaphor functioned within the Elizabethan period. Noting that the function of metaphor was in this era far more dramatic, Terence Hawkes contends that "Elizabethan metaphors speak, and they ask for a response. Modern metaphors, by contrast, try to deliver their goods in one immediate 'handing over' which is complete in itself" (*Metaphor* 22). Understanding the concept of decorum by way of its metaphorical dimension enables an appreciation of the word's contested status at the time of Sidney's writing. It was possible at this time to respond to the matter of decorum, or to the matter of its being broken, in two starkly opposing ways. For example, the mingling of kings and clowns on the public stages was becoming a feature of the new drama, and this carried a symbolic resonance – to borrow Hawkes's terms, this was a metaphor that spoke and which demanded a response. Sidney's response – registering outrage – represented one possible position. Alternatively, it was possible to not register outrage at all but to accept this staged mingling as a figurative harbinger – or even as proof – of a changed set of social relations. This was more likely the response of the public theatre audiences whose patronage can be understood as an endorsement of the material that was being presented. Unlike Sidney, they did not appear to be registering indignation. I argue that it is the implications of this shift, this different way of responding to the symbolic nature of what was being presented, that concerned Sidney

An understanding of the unique quality of Elizabethan metaphor is embedded in the *Apology*, and is manifest in moments such as when Sidney refers to literature (poesy) as a "speaking picture" (86). If the notion of decorum was an abstraction that needed to be completed, the terms by which this could be done were in a state of contestation as Sidney wrote. Essentially different ways of apprehending the material presented by the public theatres were coming into being. At the core of this disagreement was the matter of genre because apprehending a text always involves "a guess or construal of the-kind-of-thing-this-is", and this then guides the user's encounter with the text (Frow, *Genre*, 102). This process is, as Frow observes, "grounded in the institutions in which genre has its social being: the institutions of classification in the broadest sense" (*Genre*, 103). However, the volatility inherent in genre at this time can be understood as a direct

consequence of a broader institutional volatility, and this was embodied in the very make-up of the theatres wherein there was “tension between an older relation of service to a patron and the newer commercial form of service to a paying audience” (Schalkwyk 10). Did genre still represent the formal sponsoring society – in this case the aristocrats who were the patrons for the playing companies – or was there allegiance to a new community of users, those who were coming to see the plays performed in the liberties? Apprehension of the plays themselves was dependent on the answer to this question because “the-kind-of-thing-this-is” altered accordingly. In effect, this was a battle over a reading position. Sidney, endowed with theoretical understanding, arraigned the resources of genre on his side. He made use of an ally, the classical theory of genre in which decorum was inscribed, in an attempt to wrest control. The theatre’s expressions of indecorum were to be met with the right response.

The forces arrayed against Sidney’s position in this symbolic battle were, however, fast gaining momentum, and nascent capitalism was making possible an upheaval of the assumptions that had lent the concept of decorum its power. Without understanding the altered symbolic resonances commanded by the concept of decorum at this time, it can be difficult to appreciate what Sidney’s objection was really about. Genre mixing had, after all, been a feature of vernacular entertainments for centuries. The English vernacular literary tradition had “paid little regard to the antithesis between tragedy and comedy” (Hunter, “Elizabethan” 250), and genre-mixing was aligned with the more egregious indecorum of the mystery play cycles and the carnival excesses of Mayday celebrations. But while the practice of mixing genres may not have been significant in itself, the new mixed genres of the public theatres were expressions of indecorum that could not be easily dismissed. The mingling which was occurring in the public theatres was altogether different and more pernicious than that which had previously taken place in mystery plays or at times of carnival. As Douglas Bruster puts it, the new theatres “regularized and normalized carnival” (*Drama* 10). This meant that the kind of reversals that had previously been restricted to carnival now found a new more permanent expression.

The objection to genre mixing, so bound up with the notion of decorum, effectively derived from class-based concerns. Since the genre system was taken to be a reflection of conditions within the social world, the weight awarded the offence of genre mixing was determined by a genre’s hierarchical position. Sidney’s objection to the mingling of

kings and clowns can be understood as a consequence of the special weight which early modern critics awarded the genre of tragedy. Geoffrey Shepherd notes that, “[l]ike other Renaissance critics, Sidney . . . insists that genre is exclusively concerned with the aristocracy” (Sidney 188 n.25) and this position can be traced to the perceived prescriptions of Aristotle and Horace. For Aristotle, tragedy was “an imitation of people better than we are” (*Poetics* 25), and while peripheral characters might be admitted, “they cannot be at the centre of tragedy’s interest” (Heath “Introduction” xliv). The *Ars Poetica* of Horace carries a separate injunction, seemingly unequivocal when detached from its context, that “each genre [should] keep to the appropriate place allotted to it” (*Ars Poetica* 10). As O.B. Hardison observes, implicit within such an expectation was an acknowledgment that “[c]omedy treats the actions of low- and middle-class people, whereas tragedy treats the actions and destinies, usually fatal, of kings and princes” (50-51). These ideas epitomized the values intrinsic to a system of governance dependent on a hierarchical ordering of society. In this way, genres inherited from antiquity had been enshrined, at least in part, through the far more material institutions associated with governance.

Altman asserts that “[i]n the language of theoreticians, proper genre production is regularly allied with decorum, nature, science and other standards produced and defended by the sponsoring society” (Altman 12). For Sidney, the battle over discourse was underway, and the sponsoring society – the aristocracy – was not as secure as it had once been. The standard of decorum, which had long been associated with the aristocracy, faced a concomitant threat. Lest the constructed nature of what had previously been considered natural be revealed, the co-dependence inherent within the relationship between the aristocracy and the standard of decorum could not withstand too much scrutiny.

If Sidney felt his position to be vulnerable, his attachment to the standard of decorum may have been all the more pressing; a symbolic boundary marker that could not be crossed. Especially since “[a] particular obsession with boundaries usually characterizes groups that perceive themselves as minorities in constant danger of extinction” (Zerubavel 51), Sidney’s vigilance over a symbolic marker can appear disproportionate. In contrast to “the marginality of the university wits and professional playwrights, whose estateless condition forced them into the commercial worlds of popular print and performance” (Manley and MacLean 165), Sidney was a figure with ties to the

centre of Elizabethan culture. The theatres ostensibly had more cause for concern: the theatres, after all, were institutions that had been located in the liberties in order to evade the city authorities' legislative attempts to close them down. However, Sidney's proximity to powerful figures – his uncle was the Earl of Leicester – is unlikely to have been a salve for any feelings of insecurity he harboured over his own status. Sidney himself was not a member of the peerage, and the shortcomings of his position within the hierarchy may have been rendered all the more conspicuous by his proximity to those who were. A sense of exclusion may have been the consequence, and an element of this might well be gleaned in Sidney's response to the theatres. Frederic Jameson's definition of genres as "institutions or social contracts between a writer and a specific public" (*Political* 106) is useful as a way to understand Sidney's position. Although Sidney does not attack playgoers, playwrights were writing with this specific group in mind, and genres were shifting accordingly. It could be argued that a symbolic reordering of the established hierarchy was occurring. Unlike a royal masque where the aristocrats are the intended audience, Sidney was left on the margins of this entertainment. It is also because a culture's symbols are held to correlate with the non-symbolic realm that the symbolic mingling of kings and queens threatened the material power and privilege of Sidney's world. In this regard, Sidney's vigilance is explainable because the stakes were high. It is at moments of institutional instability that the significance attached to symbolic representations can undergo transformation. At such moments, it takes nothing more than the surrender of a symbol to set in motion the process whereby a corresponding reality is diminished.

A further objection to Sidney's concern is that the theatre, despite its burgeoning popularity, was a new institution whose institutional status had not yet been consolidated. Because change typically occurs slowly, Sidney's intervention might be considered pre-emptive. But the blurring of generic borders is no less concerning because it occurs within a medium that has only marginal status. As Barbara Babcock observes, "[w]hat is socially peripheral is often symbolically central" (cited Stallybrass and White 20), and violations on the fringes are capable of generating shock waves. Sidney's almost vociferous response to seemingly trivial lapses in decorum endorses the validity of this claim. Genre theorists have also invoked "the allopatric theory" and made use of terms like "dominance and periphery" in order to account for a much faster pace of generic change that has been observed occurring away from the mainstream.

Underpinning this idea is recognition of a parallel between literary evolution and an accepted tenet of Darwinian evolution whereby speciation “at the periphery of the ancestral range . . . is very rapid by evolutionary standards”. In the context of literature, “the dominant area consists of all ‘well-established’ literature, whereas the periphery is everything else . . . [t]he major point is that it is ‘outside’ as far as the mechanism of status-gaining in the literary system is concerned” (Fishelov 48-9). I posit that this presents a way of understanding how the early modern theatre, an artform that was at this time peripheral both geographically and symbolically, was nonetheless able to foster the kinds of generic transformations that prompted concern from the centre.

The pace of this change was driven by the appetite of theatre audiences for entertainment, and the divide over the role of didacticism and entertainment is perhaps best exemplified by the one contemporary play which earns Sidney’s commendation. As Wolfgang Clemen observes of *Gorboduc*, “[a]n outline of the plot . . . might suggest that it is a fast-moving play, full of bustling scenes and animated dialogue. But it is the very reverse of this” (*English* 57). In fact, there is little in the way of dialogue or dramatic conflict, little emphasis on character, and the speeches which earn Sidney’s praise appear wholly dedicated to the imparting of a moral lesson. In other words, although the play is an early attempt to fuse classical precepts with vernacular tradition, it is clear why the public stage, keen to exploit the entertainment value inherent in dramatic personalities, would quickly shed its influence. In the theatres, the need to entertain drove the creative process. It is not that Sidney objects to entertainment, but entertainment was second to didacticism; in the *Apology* he makes the order clear when he adopts a Horatian view and observes that poetry’s aim is “to teach and delight” (86). Altman has linked the idea of genre to community and notes that “[t]he imagining of community . . . always operates dialectically, through the transformation of an already existing community/genre” (203). In this sense, the different emphases which Sidney and the theatres awarded the drama’s functions of didacticism and entertainment signify that a process of transformation was underway. An older community that respected the notion of decorum was meeting a newer one. As Maslen notes, Roger Ascham and Stephen Gosson, two key anti-theatricalists of the age, believed that “one of the most dangerous aspects of modern poetry [was] its moral complexity: its tendency to encourage writers to produce indiscriminate mixtures of good and evil, virtue and vice in their efforts to entertain their audiences” (22). Unlike the anti-theatricalists,

Sidney does not object to the notion of dramatic representation *per se* but for Sidney, *Gorboduc* was a worthy play because its message about the dangers inherent in an undecided succession could not be easily misconstrued.

Elizabethan society was a “world of progressively demystifying relationships” (Neill, cited Schalkwyk 27), wherein aspects of feudalism previously taken for granted were exposed to new scrutiny. The more egregious hallmarks of feudalism – the clearly articulated rank, the subordinate’s acceptance of mastery, and the master’s expectation of deference – were beginning to look increasingly vestigial. The new community, as long as they were entertained, were open to the notion of indecorum. For Altman, “hyphenation is the vehicle of change” (204), and the genre of tragi-comedy that raises Sidney’s ire is in this sense a fitting target. In a world which had inherited its notions of genre from the Classical era, tragedy was associated with decorum, and comedy with indecorum. Tragi-comedy can therefore be understood as representing the epitome of a process whereby two poles marked by contrasting assumptions about decorum and indecorum were negotiated. As Sidney was writing, new genres were emerging, old genres were being apprehended differently, and a new community – one that privileged entertainment over didacticism – was forming. The classifications of the public theatres are in this sense a surrogate for Sidney’s anxiety over the other changes occurring in Elizabethan society for, as Mary Douglas puts it, “[c]lassification systems of all types are at base social institutions that reflect and describe the way things are in the social world” (46). New ways of classifying, and new ways of apprehending, are signs of new communities and different interests. The very system of genre that Sidney adhered to was in the process of being transformed.

### **The Rejection of Classical Convention: *King Henry V***

In the *Apology*, Sidney had conceded that *Gorboduc* was “faulty both in time and place” but had added the caveat that “if it be so in *Gorboduc*, how much more in all the rest?” (110). Sidney’s stance on genre here is very much that of the neo-classical critic, and at odds with the view of genre that is typically held by artists who “have always seen generic conventions as an opportunity to play with expectations rather than a set of rules to be followed” (Poole 115). It is therefore understandable that playwrights would want to achieve new ends by dispensing with conventions such as the classical unities. A play like Shakespeare’s *King Henry V* (1599) could in many ways be considered an

epitome of what Sidney found objectionable. If *Gorboduc* represented for Sidney a significant achievement, it has been observed that *Henry V* “represents a key moment in the history of early modern drama” (Crawforth et al 11). But it is not a moment that Sidney would have endorsed. *Henry V* departs from classical strictures in any number of ways: most conspicuously, it departs from the unities, and it depicts violence on stage. From an ideological perspective, Sidney would have found the play’s collapsing of class distinctions problematic and, perhaps even worse, the play resolutely privileges entertainment over the imparting of any moral message. Each of these “violations”, however, served a function for Shakespeare.

The Chorus in *King Henry V*, a device which enabled manipulations of time and place – and which achieved them by way of brazen pronouncement – could hardly have been endorsed by a neo-classical critic. For Sidney, although *Gorboduc* was “in truth . . . very defectious in the circumstances” (110), its slippages from convention were nonetheless motivated and made comprehensible by way of the story. More offensive to Sidney’s taste were plays that “have Asia of the one side, and Afric of the other, and so many other under-kingdoms, that the player, when he cometh in, must ever begin with telling where he is, or else the tale will not be conceived” (110). Shakespeare, adding insult to injury, appropriates the Chorus for this very purpose. In classical practice, the Chorus was used to create “interludes between the action on a structural level, but with a content always of thematic importance to the drama” (Torrance 10). Arguably, Shakespeare’s practice is consistent with this stricture, but the Elizabethan dramatist also uses this classical device in a decidedly unclassical way. Whereas the use of the Chorus by classical Greek dramatists was consistent with an observance of the classical unities, Shakespeare’s use represents a resolute break from those unities. For those in the audience maintaining allegiances to the classical model, this could only have been perceived as an egregious departure. In the Prologue to *Every Man in his Humour* (1616), Ben Jonson, the most classically inclined dramatist of the day, drew a distinction between his own play and those, like *Henry V*, whose Chorus “wafts you o’er the seas”. But this supposed defect could also be viewed as a strength. It was this new use of the Chorus that made temporal and spatial bounds possible, and these manipulations of the unities were self-consciously and unapologetically executed.

The genre of tragicomedy obviously represents much of what Sidney finds objectionable about the stage. Behind tragicomedy were the impulses of Romance to

meld different times and places into a coherent narrative structure. It was inherently a vernacular form and one that, in prose at least, Sidney was entirely comfortable with – his own *Arcadia* was for the Elizabethans a famous example. But on stage, the representation of Romance meant the scuppering of classical convention. The dramatic genres of the stage would be shaped by this urge to accommodate vernacular tradition to more recognizable classical structures. Cyrus Mulready observes of *Henry V* that “this play transforms chronicle history into imperial romance” and that by way of this strategy “creates imperial visions of the new *Pax Romanum*” (117, 115). It is by way of formal departures from classical precedent that *Henry V* is able to fulfil a set of ideological obligations specific to its historical moment. The stage’s capacity to telescope temporally distant events thus allows the English achievement at Agincourt to be reinforced with the celebratory fervour attendant upon Henry’s return. Dispensing with the unities enables Shakespeare to include both “the vasty fields of France” and the London of Henry’s triumphal return which “doth pour out her citizens” (5.0. 24). The strategies deployed, and the audience’s own willingness to be complicit in the desired effects, achieve what would otherwise be impossible. As the Chorus famously puts it in the Prologue:

For ‘tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,  
Turning th’accomplishment of many years  
Into an hour-glass (1.0.28-31).

It is consequently not hard to imagine *Henry V* earning Sidney’s ire. If *Gorboduc* is “not conceived in terms of a dramatic conflict between living people, but as an ‘exemplum’ for a moral discourse” (Clemen 61), then *Henry V* is the antithesis of this. The differences in the two plays’ representations of violence are especially noteworthy. Regardless of its validity or lack thereof, a critical tendency to denounce *Henry V* as “an immoral play which legitimizes and praises violence” (Taylor, Introduction 3) suggests the extent to which the depiction of dramatic action is privileged over any obvious moral didacticism. The play’s representation of violence is of course one of the more obvious ways in which *Henry V* departs from classical precedent. The classical dramatic genres which Sidney valorizes were disinclined to depict violence on stage. At least in the case of classical Greek drama, “[s]tage equipment and props were few; the action was largely stylized, even static, with the more violent action being conceived as taking place offstage, then being reported to the actors, often in a long narrative speech”

(Rutherford ix). Later Roman drama, especially that of Seneca, was somewhat more spectacular and allowed depictions of suicides and mutilations. But despite the reputation these plays held for bloodshed they were largely considered to be examples of closet drama – modern scholarship is more circumspect about this assumption (Smith, R Scott xxi) – and consequently the ideal of not showing violence on stage was held by the Elizabethans to be characteristic of classical dramaturgy. Such precepts would have informed Sidney’s thinking about the genre of tragedy.

Key to Sidney’s conception of tragedy was the precept that the genre uphold socially inscribed ideas about hierarchy. The St Crispin’s Day speech, perhaps the most famous of all the speeches in *Henry V*, plays on a vision of a utopian society that has dispensed with class divisions. In anticipation of a shared endeavour with his troops, Henry privileges feelings of solidarity over the divisions that are inherent within a society based on clear distinctions between royalty, aristocracy, and commoners. Henry’s speech secures a vision of fellowship whereby social distinctions are erased, where participation in a shared venture earns commoners the right to stand on an equal footing with royalty:

For he that sheds his blood with me  
Shall be my brother; be he ne’er so vile,  
This day shall gentle his condition (4.3.61-63).

This might be considered an instance where Sidney’s worst fears about playwrights “mingling kings and clowns . . . with neither decency nor discretion” (112) are given edge and weight. The adjective “vile” can be understood as functioning as an analogue to the term “clownish”, specifically since both terms connoted qualities which the prejudiced would associate with the rustic and low-born. Nevertheless, in this instance, this is to be no barrier to brotherhood. If this idea in itself were not sufficient to offend the high-born, what might have made it worse is that the words are being delivered by a character supposing to be a king, and thus bear a kind of quasi-royal imprimatur. And if the implication is that the common foot soldier shall have his status raised by serving alongside Henry, then the inverse is also true. At the beginning of Act Five, the Chorus reinforces a view of Henry as content with the honours awarded the commoner. Noting that he disdained affectation on his progress through the city of London, the audience is told that this behaviour is in keeping with the man and his “Being free from vainness and self-glorious pride” (5.0.20).

In *Henry V*, kings and clowns, royalty and rustics, fight together in order to make a difference to the outcome of the battle and, in the course of the play, a particular version of a shared enterprise between royalty and commoners is propagated. England's view of itself as a fledgling but blessed empire is most obviously found in Shakespeare's handling of the English victory at Agincourt. Given that Henry's St Crispin's Day speech precedes this triumph, it is fitting that it is painted as "England's victory and God's victory, not Henry's" (Taylor, Introduction 47). In order to achieve this effect, the significance of Henry's role as battle commander is deliberately underplayed. To this end, as Taylor observes, "Shakespeare omits all references to Henry's tactics – the concealment of his archers, the pointed staves used to protect them from the French horsemen, the narrow field between two copses which prevented the French from taking full advantage of their numbers" (Introduction 47). It could be said that just as the St Crispin's Day speech achieves through rhetoric the effect of collapsing the distinctions between kings and clowns, these omissions achieve it through the manipulation of plot. Henry here is represented not as a significant figure but simply as one of the soldiers who, with God's help, has achieved victory. After the battle, Henry's choice of the hymn *Non nobis*, or Psalm 115 (4.8.124) – "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory" – contributes to the effect. In this retelling of Agincourt, it is not the leader's strategies that have secured victory; it is rather the shared and blessed participation of royalty and commoners alike.

Could Sidney have approved of anything in this play? The play's reference in the Chorus of Act 5 to England's ongoing attempts to subdue Irish rebellion may well have found favour. Although, beginning with Warren D. Smith, it has sometimes been argued that the allusion is to Charles Blount, Lord Mountjoy, more typically it has been thought to refer to Robert Devereaux, the Earl of Essex. Indeed, Taylor has gone so far as to claim it as "the only explicit, extra-dramatic, incontestable reference to a contemporary event anywhere in the canon" (Introduction 7). What may have been more important to Sidney is that the reference imagines aristocracy and royalty participating in a shared realm, and suggests the significance of the aristocracy in national affairs. While this might have appealed to Sidney's sensibility, *Henry V* is nonetheless a play where "good and evil, virtue and vice" are mixed in the interests of entertainment. For Sidney, this would have compromised any moral lesson to which the play might lay claim. Essex's Irish campaign, after all, had turned out to be a disaster and any hopes that the

aristocracy might continue to play a significant role in national affairs seemed to die with it. Paradoxically then, by the time of *Henry V*'s first performance, the allusion to Essex would have functioned bathetically, its celebratory ring now sounding hollow and serving to underscore the failings of the aristocracy.

Sidney, too, might have found something to admire in the Salic Law speech that opens *Henry V*. This speech, a justification of Henry's claim to the throne of France, invites comparison with the dry, legalistic speeches that feature in *Gorboduc*. But while ostensibly resembling the speeches of *Gorboduc*, the Salic Law speech fulfils a quite different function within the overall context of Shakespeare's play. In *Gorboduc*, the speeches that "follow one another in massive and ponderous array" equate to "cold deliberation and the endless debating of pros and cons" (Clemen 59). In failing to provide any obvious springs for subsequent action, they are inherently undramatic. The Archbishop of Canterbury's long discourse on Salic Law in *Henry V*, although it has been considered "unrivalled for tediousness" in the plays of Shakespeare (Humphreys, cited Taylor, Introduction 34), is ultimately used as a foil against which more straightforwardly dramatic effects can be created. As Taylor notes, "[t]he rhetorical thrill of Henry's reply to the Dauphin, which closes Act One, directly depends upon the frustratingly slow pace and low key with which that Act begins" (Introduction 37). Unlike the set speeches used in *Gorboduc*, then, this speech fulfils a structural purpose, and its real significance lies somewhere other than the archbishop's words. Henry himself signals this when, appearing to tire of the archbishop's prolixity, he interjects to effect a conclusion: "May I with right and conscience make this claim?" (1.2.96). For Henry, the archbishop's words carry no intrinsic worth; they are simply a means to an end. The same might be said of how this speech functions within the drama. In the context of the play itself, the speech is structurally necessary because it scaffolds the action that is to follow. It serves a dramatic effect without being ostensibly dramatic in itself. It is integral to the play's pacing, and pacing is of course important because if an audience's interest is lost so too is the opportunity to entertain them. Its function is therefore structural rather than overtly didactic, but it is this very privileging of entertainment over didacticism that Sidney is likely to have found objectionable. Ultimately, it must be conceded that the features which Sidney considers praiseworthy in *Gorboduc* – its moralizing, its set speeches, even its lack of dramatic enactment and visceral engagement – are effectively absent from Shakespeare's play.

In the conclusion to the *Apology*, Sidney had referred to his work as “this ink-wasting toy of mine” (*Apology* 116/21). A posture it may have been, but not all of the *Apology* was so disingenuous. It has been noted that while Donne was the poet “most widely disseminated in manuscript in the seventeenth century”, Sidney is “clearly the most important manuscript author of the Elizabethan period” (Love and Marotti 69, 66). Sidney was a central figure within his culture and his reputation would make inevitable the posthumous publication of the *Apology* in 1595. It would also make inevitable another, perhaps less easily imaginable, outcome. For while Sidney would not be effective in legislating against the indecorum of the public stage, his influence would still be felt. It has been observed that Sidney was “[o]ne notable voice of regret about the declining influence of classical models of tragedy” (Cadman et al, 3) and, indeed, Sidney had argued in the *Apology* for the preservation of the classical hierarchy and the values it enshrined. Those working in the new theatres – an artform which as yet was assigned little legitimacy by the culture at large – could hardly have failed to notice the prestige which the classical genres generated. Arguably, Sidney made the case so thoroughly that those in the theatres sought to borrow some of this prestige. Sidney, who had taken great care to arraign the power of classical genre on his side in his defence of decorum, could not have known that classical genres would become fodder for the theatres. But by borrowing the inherited forms, the theatres effectively set in motion the process whereby these same genres – which Sidney had hoped would endure as models – would be transformed. In effect, the theatres would use Sidney’s own weapon against him. The societal shift away from the old models of decorum would continue and genre transformation would contribute to it. But if the power of neo-classical critics in this period was to diminish, disagreements about genre were not to disappear. The volatility that was the corollary to this transformation of the genre system would inevitably lead to friction as playwrights explored new possibilities and challenged the expectations of their audiences. Commercial failure was the likely outcome in such cases, but it was not the only outcome. The same background of instability could also enable moments of shared understanding between playwrights and their audiences, and even ostensibly conventional plays could harbour the seeds of striking innovation. The next chapter examines instances where the instability inherent within early modern genre gave rise to each of these scenarios.

## Chapter Two – The Playwrights

John Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess* (1608) and Francis Beaumont's *Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607) are two of the most famous failures of the Renaissance stage. In what follows, I propose an explanation for the commercial failure of these plays by exploring the nature of the splits that occurred between playwright and audience. Consequently, I examine the reasons why genre, so central to understanding, became in these instances an obstacle preventing it. But given that these plays looked forward to new styles of theatre, it is worth considering why another play celebrated as a precursor succeeded where they failed. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1600) has become almost the archetype of an early modern theatrical practice which, through its innovation, anticipated much of what would become familiar to theatre-goers in subsequent centuries. It has been observed, however, that it is equally valid to view *Hamlet* as a backward-looking play. In its structure *Hamlet* is considered an example of Elizabethan revenge tragedy, and allusions throughout the play direct the audience's attention to that most well-known of early modern plays, *The Spanish Tragedy* (printed 1592). This means that for all its departures from type, *Hamlet* would not have presented its first audience with any major obstacles to understanding.

As observed in the previous chapter, genre fulfils both an ideological and a ritual function (Altman 188), and one explanation for the instability of Renaissance genre lies in the way genre's ideological capacity began to recede as new stakeholders asserted fresh interests. This chapter's focus is on the relationship between playwrights and audiences, and on how audiences can be understood as drivers of the increased prominence of genre's ritual function in this period. The ritual view of genre suggests that genres succeed because they function on a referential level to evoke cultural traditions which carry meaning for their audiences, and audiences are thus "the ultimate creators of genres" (Altman 27). I argue that early modern theatre existed in a state of tension between the ideological and the ritual, and that consequently both these approaches suggest something important about the forces acting on genre in the period. But whereas the previous chapter examined the conflict between ideological and ritual investment through considering the sources of the dissatisfaction voiced by Sidney in the *Apology*, this chapter focuses on the sometimes strained nature of the relations between playwrights and audiences. Accordingly, the location of the tension is different. Rather than being situated in a divide between the ritual and the ideological, the tension

is located wholly in genre's ritual function. For audiences in the early modern period, I contend that this ritual function asserted a new prominence. In this period, audiences were increasingly invested in genre's capacity to offer signposts which affirmed shared cultural understandings. If the culture at large was undergoing transformation, the worlds presented on the playhouse stages were embedded in this. These fictional worlds could also be unsettling or confusing at times and a way was needed to navigate them. Guidance was provided by genre's ritual function. This is more readily understood when it is remembered that, in addition to the role they play as a means of categorization, genres can be understood as "specific systems of expectation and hypothesis" which function to ground encounters with a text (Neale 31). In this sense, the role performed by genre in orienting an audience to the work cannot be underestimated. In an era of generic instability, although appearances may suggest otherwise, this role becomes even more pronounced. At such times, when conditions allow the proliferation of texts marked by innovation, audiences come to depend even more on familiar genre codes which provide a way of negotiating the otherwise unfamiliar.

If genres fulfil some ritual purpose for their audiences, they do so "by rehearsing the stories, characters and topics that the culture deems important" (Altman 188). Genres are able to perform this role in two ways. By directly referencing culturally significant traditions, genres perform a memorial function. As an example, Altman notes the genre of chancel drama which emerged around the turn of the first millennium. In rehearsing a Biblical episode celebrated in Christian rituals, chancel drama represented "not only a well-known story, but an annually repeated aspect of Christian life" and thus served "as a memorial both to a collective past and to a current collectivity" (188). Genres, however, are also capable of serving what Altman terms a "pseudo-memorial" function. Typically, alongside culturally significant traditions being invoked directly through the text, references to these traditions are also made indirectly by way of intertexts. The intertextual network which enables this is, in fact, essential to the operation of genre. Each text, in order to make sense for its audience, must make reference to other genre texts. Altman notes that at moments when a proliferation of entertainment choices enables familiarity with a greater number of intertexts, a corresponding shift away from the straightforward memorial function can occur. At such moments, audiences will increasingly be offered "pseudo-memorials" by way of the text's increased reliance on

intertexts, and the proportions between the text's referential dimension (the memorial), and its intertextual dimension (the pseudo-memorial) will shift (Altman 189).

By way of illustration, the Chorus at the conclusion of Shakespeare's *Henry V* invites the audience to consider events which are outside that play's compass but "Which oft our stage hath shown". The reference here is not to the events themselves; rather it is to Shakespeare's own representations of them in the *Henry VI* plays. The audience are further informed that the popularity of these earlier plays cues an appropriate response to the present play: "and for their sake / In your fair minds let this acceptance take" (Epilogue 13-14). The implication is that since the audience responded favourably to the plays previously presented, they should also enjoy *Henry V*. In this instance, the *Henry VI* plays function as intertexts. Actual historical events are invoked by way of their representations that have already occurred on the Elizabethan stage, and the genres which these plays participate in come to serve a pseudo-memorial instead of a memorial function. The traditions invoked are thus at a further remove from the text, and only represented in an oblique fashion. Paradoxically, however, this does not necessarily dilute the text's power to invoke the audience's shared points of cultural reference. Whereas the audience do not have direct experience of the actual historical events, as playgoers they have shared the experience of witnessing staged representations of those events. In this way, the audience's knowledge of these specific intertexts helps to foster the sense of a shared cultural experience. For the spectators in this moment, the facsimile is arguably more powerful than the historical event which they cannot directly access. Thus, the term "pseudo-memorial" need not imply a diminution of affect. What is key in order to secure the audience's emotional investment is the familiarity of the genre or genres underpinning the intertextual reference. In this instance, the pseudo-memorial conjured by way of intertexts has supplanted the actual memorial. In early modern London, the capacity for genres to offer pseudo-memorials would have been enabled by the number of texts circulating in repertory theatre.

Altman's distinction between the memorial and pseudo-memorial functions of genre, which he understands through twentieth century systems of mass entertainment, is a valuable one. Altman's distinction, however, must be amended if it is to retain its usefulness in a discussion of early modern drama. Like the systems of mass entertainment that Altman is concerned with, the repertory system enabled the conditions whereby a proliferation of entertainment choices could occur. The scenario

posited by Altman would see the users of genre as being affected more or less equally by this proliferation of texts. I argue, on the other hand, that playwrights and audiences of the early modern period were each affected differently. Amongst other things, audiences looked to plays in order to see representations of themselves and to understand themselves in a changing world. Playwrights were not excluded from this desire, and it must be conceded that they too sought endorsement of self-fashioned identities. But a potential for tension existed in how each group apprehended the drama produced by the playhouses. Specifically, playwrights and playgoers perceived the intertextual framework that was so essential to the operation of genre in different ways. For audiences, intertexts were significant for their pseudo-memorial function. Through this, they provided generic clues which aided in the apprehension of the text at hand. By using the intertextual framework in this way to successfully orient themselves to the text, the audience were effectively placing themselves in relation to shared markers that were culturally significant. An additional consideration for playwrights was that the very intertexts they chose for their plays could earn them a form of recognition from other playwrights.

The notion that playwrights sought the approval of their peers suggests some further possibilities. What if, in seeking the approval of their peers, playwrights placed at risk the commercial success upon which they depended? What if, in seeking such approval, playwrights inadvertently created a divide themselves and the audience? If playwrights could be drawn away from the interests of the public, a different way of understanding the failures of the Renaissance stage is presented. And the obverse is also true, for other plays of the Renaissance stage could represent a playwright's willingness to forego the possibility of peer approval. In the Induction to *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), Ben Jonson famously mocked the "Tales, Tempests, and such-like drolleries" that had been a feature of Shakespeare's recent plays, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. Shakespeare had made much of familiar romance conventions in both these plays, and as a company shareholder in the King's Men, it is likely that his intention was to please audiences and to gain commercial advantage with this manoeuvre. But while audiences may have been reassured by the familiar, and more able to accept innovations within *The Winter's Tale* as a consequence, Jonson's own concern to be up-to-the-minute led him to deride such ostensibly obvious gestures. As a practising playwright, Jonson had intimate knowledge of the repertory's offerings, and

his own playwriting made use of precursor texts as a way of signposting his individual standing among his contemporaries. Jonson's reference to Shakespeare in *Bartholomew Fair* adumbrates the distance between his own practice and that of some of his contemporaries. Shakespeare, with these plays, was willing to assimilate older styles in order to please audiences, and was prepared to do this even at the risk of being perceived as less than innovative.

The explanation for why intertexts may have functioned differently for playwrights and playgoers is perhaps best approached through Saussure's well-known distinction between the signifier and the signified. Typically, as Russ McDonald notes, "[l]anguage . . . necessarily and immediately directs our attention away from itself to an idea or image, the 'signified' that the signifier represents" (McDonald, *Arts* 3). This can be understood as analogous to how the pseudo-memorial function works. For playgoers, the significance of intertextual references typically lay not in themselves but in the shared memorials to which they pointed. In the early modern period, this pseudo-memorial function of intertexts is likely to have been key to comprehension of the work itself. In a period marked by generic instability, it was necessary that the audience had some secure generic signposts. Such signposts, in directing attention to what was already familiar, were vital as a way of negotiating what might otherwise have been confusingly innovative texts. In this way, the audience's capacity to engage with the innovative elements within plays like *The Winter's Tale* and *Tempest* would have been enabled by their having recourse to generic signposts familiar from any number of romances.

But for practitioners of an artform, in this instance the playwrights, significance typically resides more in the signifier itself. In the fast-paced world of repertory theatre, playwrights perused each other's work for up-to-the-minute references. The pseudo-memorial function of generic signposts, their capacity to endorse what is culturally shared, was a less valuable currency to playwrights concerned with the accumulation of cultural capital. As theatre professionals, playwrights were competent in navigating different terms of reference, and given the testimonials of Fletcher's peers recorded in the first quarto edition of *The Faithful Shepherdess*, even a relatively obscure genre like Italian tragicomedy presented no obstacles for understanding. In this way, the competing interests of playwright and playgoer can be understood by way of a dialectic centred on the pseudo-memorial function of intertexts. I argue that this way of

conceiving the operation of genre is key to understanding the reception of Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess* and Beaumont's *Knight of the Burning Pestle*. These two plays illustrate the breakdown in communication which occurs when, for various reasons, those in the audience are unable to make use of the meanings stored in the codes of familiar genres.

Fletcher's pastoral tragicomedy *La fida pastora* or *The Faithful Shepherdess*, like Beaumont's *Knight* and Beaumont and Fletcher's *Cupid's Revenge*, was performed at the Blackfriars. Its first and probably only Jacobean performance occurred in 1607 or 1608 by the Children of the Queen's Revels. This famous troupe of child actors was then near the end of its reign at the Blackfriars' venue; the satirical edge of its performances would soon exceed the patience of King James. Despite the celebrated skill of the young performers, "[t]he first production was a complete failure, a fact that is the theme of the commendatory poems [in the 1609 quarto edition] by Field, Beaumont, Jonson, and Chapman" (Kirk x). This was obviously a bitter disappointment for the playwright, and it has been noted that some of the quarto's verses "console Fletcher . . . in tones which suggest a recent disappointment, not one that has had time to wear off" (Wiggins, *Catalogue* #1582). The play's failure can largely be ascribed to the audience's confusion over the play's genre wherein elements of continental tragicomedy sat alongside somewhat more familiar aspects of pastoral romance.

Within the plot, which features shepherds and shepherdesses in a woodland setting, the trope of concealed and mistaken identity is invoked in order to complicate otherwise straightforward assignations between the characters. While some characters find themselves in situations of grave danger, tragedy is averted through the intervention of benevolent spirits, and figures such as a Satyr, a River-God, and a Priest of Pan all make appearances. The effect generated by these figures is reinforced by practices consistent with a pagan setting, and the shape-shifting which occurs through the use of some magic and potent herbs fits within the play's universe. The play concludes with more magic: a test of chastity which sees the unchaste banished. The chaste, meanwhile, are free to live on under the benevolent watch of the satyr who has been newly appointed as the woodland's guardian spirit. In conceiving such a plot, Fletcher self-consciously borrowed from the model set by the Italian Battista Guarini, particularly as set out in his play *Il Pastor Fido*.

Fletcher's own preface to *The Faithful Shepherdess* suggests that the audience was unfamiliar with the intertextual references made throughout his play. But this in itself is unlikely to have prevented the play being understood. Authors are typically free to indulge a range of intertextual allusions, even quite obscure ones, without impeding the audience's comprehension (Frow, *Genre* 49). This is possible because, even in an extreme instance where a text is modelled almost exclusively on a single precursor text, it is not strictly necessary for the audience to be familiar with that precursor text. As Frow observes, "something, perhaps nearly everything, can be understood . . . [because] the precursor text belongs to a genre: its meanings never belong to it alone" (*Genre* 49). Genre thus enables meaning. To note an extreme instance, a version of the Cyclops myth by Euripides is the only complete extant example of a once very popular genre: the satyr-drama. Euripides' *Cyclops* is nevertheless comprehensible because its meanings can still be construed generically. Thus, from this one play and from surviving fragments of other satyr-dramas, classical scholars have been able to "deduce some generic features of the genre" (Torrance 13). Meanings therefore do not emanate from either texts or genres alone; rather, they are enabled by the systematic existence which both share. If the audience is not directly familiar with the specifics of the intertexts, they should nonetheless have recourse to familiar generic blueprints that is at their source. More importantly, if genre is "a shared convention with a social force" (Frow 102), the audience will be able to make sense of this blueprint through its social significance. In this way, the audience can use the intertext to gain access to a repertoire of cultural understandings. In the process, the significance of the intertext itself will often be elided because the audience will be more invested in the social action which genre performs.

Crucially, and more damagingly, the audience for *The Faithful Shepherdess* was not familiar with the genre of Italian tragicomedy which Fletcher had drawn on in the creation of his play. Thus, not only were members of the audience unfamiliar with the intertexts, they were unfamiliar with the originating genre itself. The words spoken by the characters may therefore have made literal sense but the schematic world sketched by this play did not make generic sense. The audience were consequently unable to use the play to enable any kind of social action. I take Fletcher's play as an exemplary instance underscoring the necessity of a text's connection to a recognizable model of genre. The necessity of this holds even for those works that are held to be innovative in

a ground-breaking way. Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* (c. 1587), most often considered for the originality of its contribution to early modern drama, is also simultaneously "a striking instance of Renaissance neo-classicism", and a play whose "popularity seems to have originated more or less in [its] chivalric-romance framework" (Romany and Lindsey xvi; Ide 7). The two parts of *Tamburlaine the Great*, as Andrew Duxfield has shown, can also be read "as *de casibus* tragedy – or at least as representing an engagement with the *de casibus* tradition" (17). At least some of the audience's expectations were thus fulfilled rather than confounded. In contrast, an audience's inability to connect a play to a recognizable genre will result in an inability to understand the text itself. Beaumont's *Knight of the Burning Pestle* represents a more particular instance of this phenomenon. In the case of *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, the audience knew very well the genre of romance upon which the play's intertextual references drew. But Beaumont and his audience knew different versions of this genre. Playwright and audience were so divided in their uses of the Romance genre that the play itself became a site of contested meanings.

Of course, there is typically tension between writers and audiences with regard to genre conventions, but this tension can often be productive. Indeed, the scope for variation can sometimes be surprising. As David Fishelov observes, "[e]ven the sonnet's high degree of formal constraint may still illustrate the principle of variability" (47). The sonnet, a form which in the sixteenth century was firmly associated with the formal and thematic conventions established by Petrarch, was nonetheless able to accommodate Philip Sidney's innovations with the *Astrophil and Stella* sequence. It has been noted that "[m]arkedly few of Sidney's sonnets unreflectively repeat Petrarchan mainstays" (Simon 89). Furthermore, Sidney's hero is very often the literary antithesis of the Petrarchan narrator that is his predecessor in that he displays behaviour that is bold and confident. In a similar way, the effect of the overall sequence is to create a backdrop whereby even "a typical love sonnet . . . turns out, in the context of almost a hundred redactions, to seem more artificial and culturally grounded than it does alone" (Greene 223). In this instance, the artist's response to a set of unique conditions becomes substantiated within the genre itself. Shakespeare's later sequence of sonnets, in being "in important respects both anti-Petrarchan and anti-Sidneian", makes an even more radical revision of the form. Beyond the fact that the addressee for five-sixths of the sequence is a young aristocratic male, "the stale conceits of mistress-worship" are even

rejected when Shakespeare turns his attention to the “dark lady” (Duncan-Jones 46, 49). The significance of such departures from convention, and the effectiveness of individual poems within the collection, nonetheless depend on the audience’s familiarity with sets of established conceits. However, it is clear that the challenge which Sidney and Shakespeare issued to the form of the sonnet did not alienate readers: Sidney’s sequence established the Elizabethan vogue for sonnets, and Shakespeare’s was also much celebrated, with Francis Meres in *Palladis Tamia* (1598) referencing Shakespeare’s “sugred Sonnets” before any of them had even appeared in print (Duncan-Jones 1). Early modern writers, working in a poetics that was mimetic rather than expressive (Abrams, *Mirror*, esp. ch1), thus created novelty through the variation of inherited rules. While Beaumont may have been aiming for a comparable result, *Knight of the Burning Pestle* passed over the – always hard to determine – acceptable boundaries for genre experimentation. *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* subverted expectations so much that playgoers were unable to make a meaningful connection to it. Taken together, Fletcher’s *Faithful Shepherdess* and Beaumont’s *Knight of the Burning Pestle* underscore that, while recognition of specific intertextual references may not be strictly necessary, it is imperative that there be shared understandings between author and audience at the level of genre.

*Hamlet* underscores this in a positive way. As Emma Smith notes, observations on Shakespeare’s indebtedness to his predecessors can be perceived as an affront to the Bloomian assertion that Shakespeare, alone among poets, did not suffer from an “anxiety of influence” (*Approaching Shakespeare*). Somewhat contrarily, however, I do wish to argue for Shakespeare’s singularity in a more limited sense. That is to say, insofar as it balances pragmatic and aesthetic considerations, *Hamlet* can be read as an expression of Shakespeare’s commercial acumen. Like his later *Winter’s Tale* and *Tempest*, plays that were contemporaneous with those of Beaumont and Fletcher, Shakespeare in *Hamlet* was able to produce a play that balanced the playwright’s concern for novelty and innovation with the audience’s expectations of familiarity. *The Faithful Shepherdess* and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, on the other hand, are examples of what occurs when this balance is not achieved. These plays show what happens when a playwright takes the audience too far too quickly. I argue that the concept of genre, particularly the understanding that each text participates in a broader genre system, is central to these issues and enables their analysis. In looking at three

instances, this chapter does not intend to homologize the relationship between playwrights and playgoers; rather, the emphasis is on exploring the consequences of the sometimes discrete orientations of playwrights and playgoers, two groups each concerned with and invested in different aspects of the production and consumption of plays.

### **Fletcher's preface to *The Faithful Shepherdess*: a conflict over genre**

As "an attempt to integrate Italianate pastoral with the English tradition" (Munro 124), Fletcher's play is essential to any consideration of English tragicomedy. The play's quarto edition (1609) included Fletcher's "To the Reader", a preface which was ostensibly motivated by the play's theatrical failure and to which much critical attention has been assigned. As Lucy Munro notes, although the origins of seventeenth-century tragicomedy cannot be traced to this play alone, the words penned by Fletcher in its defence "have haunted critical writing" on the genre (96). By informing the reader that "[A] tragie-comedie is not so called in respect of mirth and killing" (15), Fletcher aligned himself with a claim made by Guarini that "he who makes a tragicomedy does not intend to compose separately either a tragedy or a comedy, but from the two a third thing that will be perfect of its kind" (qtd. Maguire 11). The English public, although comfortable with Sidney's and Spenser's naturalized versions of pastoral, were largely unfamiliar with Italian tragicomedy, and the didactic tone of Fletcher's preface is emblematic of much Renaissance criticism. Fletcher has no qualms about privileging his definition of tragicomedy and will not countenance his own artistic intentions being held ransom to the audience's expectations.

It is not often that an author's intentions are made so transparent, and Fletcher's words function as an ironic twist on what twentieth-century critics would term the "intentional fallacy". For if attempts to construe the author's intentions through the text are inevitably doomed to fail, the author's own attempt to impose intentionality through the text is a similarly fraught enterprise. Fletcher's preface reveals the extent to which his intentions have been frustrated by the audience's "singuler gift in defining". According to Munro, the initial reception of *The Faithful Shepherdess* demonstrates that "[d]ramatist and audience . . . were not basing their ideas of pastoral and tragicomedy on the same literary or dramatic sources" (97). While this is true, I argue that more was at the source of the divide between playwright and playgoer. That is, while Fletcher's

words convey the impression that the audience were deficient in their understanding of continental tragicomedy, such knowledge alone would not have ensured Fletcher's play a better reception. Rather than a simple disagreement over textual features, the conflict between author and audience in this instance was conceptual, grounded in different assumptions about the work performed by genre.

The genre theorist Carolyn Miller's articulation of the different principles used to classify discourse, and of the varying effects that these produce, provide a means by which the furore over *The Faithful Shepherdess* can be re-examined. For Miller, genres are defined by the rhetorical actions they are used to accomplish rather than by any intrinsic structure. Genres, in addition to being "a complex of formal and substantive features" are thus recognizable by the different pragmatic or rhetorical responses they generate (Miller 25). The diametrically opposed reactions provoked by genres such as tragedy or comedy, the source of the characters' dispute in the Induction to *A Warning for Fair Women*, help to illustrate what is at stake here. Genres thus represent "typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations". As examples, the genres of the lecture, the apology, or the eulogy are used to enable different actions within what can be considered "typified rhetorical situation[s]" (Miller 31). Genre, in other words, "gets a certain kind of work done" (Frow, *Genre* 18) and there are two significant entailments to this. Firstly, genres are vernacular rather than top-down constructs. This means that however much a playwright like Fletcher may have wished to "correct" his audience's perception of pastoral tragicomedy, the authority to do so does not reside with the author. It is the audience that is effectively in control of the genre. Secondly, form is necessarily subordinate to function. This means that while Fletcher may consider his play a pastoral tragicomedy on the basis of its formal features, the audience is under no obligation to share this point of view. For the audience, what is more important in determining genre membership is the matter of use. All genres of course generate different sets of expectations. Fletcher's audience, in understanding *The Faithful Shepherdess* as a Pastoral play, was cued to expect a particular kind of affective response. The play, however, failed to fulfil their expectations; in Miller's terms, it failed to accomplish the expected rhetorical action. Despite Fletcher's protestations, this meant that for the audience the play was resolutely *not* a pastoral tragicomedy. Two different orientations towards genre can therefore be sketched by way of the divide between Fletcher and his audience.

The pseudo-memorial function of genre which I see as key to the divisions between playwrights and playgoers within this historical moment, can be understood as a facet of this rhetorical work that genres are able to perform. The pseudo-memorial function – that is, the capacity of texts to offer audiences a collective experience through invoking already familiar texts – can therefore be subsumed under an approach to genre that departs from the more taxonomically-oriented and which emphasizes instead the capacity of genres to perform social action. In displaying the different expectations and values of the playwright and playgoers, the furore over *The Faithful Shepherdess* highlights the significance of the symbolic work that genres perform. Fletcher’s famous preface to *The Faithful Shepherdess* makes it clear that his interest remains with the signifier itself rather than with any affective response which it might generate. As Fletcher observes:

It is a pastoral Tragic-comedie, which the people . . . concluded to be a play of country hired Shepheards, in gray cloaks, with curtaild dogs in strings, sometimes laughing together, and sometimes killing one another: And missing whitsun ales, creame, wassel and morris dances, began to be angry (Fletcher 15).

Fletcher, in other words, notes the “typified rhetorical situation” which the members of the audience were familiar with and which they had been expecting. His play, however, disrupted these expectations by not providing a typified generic response to a recurrent situation. Playgoer-satisfaction presumably in some way depends on the extent to which experience lives up to expectations and, conceding this, it must be significant that Fletcher notes that “the people . . . “began to be angry”. Since part of the crucial work performed by genres is to arouse expectations, the generic signposts provided to the audience in this instance appear to have caused confusion. It may have been that, since the members of Fletcher’s audience were part of a society undergoing a shift from agrarianism to capitalism, any reference to the elements associated with the pastoral genre is likely to have generated feelings of nostalgia for a fast vanishing world. Fletcher’s play does not deliver on this desire for nostalgia, and he gives short shrift to the audience’s expectations of that kind of engagement. As a corollary, I argue that the failure of *The Faithful Shepherdess* can be attributed to Fletcher’s refusal in this instance to engage with the rhetorical work which genres perform. Fletcher’s insistence that the audience understand the play according to his own terms, rather than by way of the

expectations generated through the power of genre, is a manoeuvre that ultimately cannot be sustained.

That the audience “began to be angry” can also be understood as a marker of the significance which the early modern theatre held for playgoers, and the type of emotional investment which it aroused. The theatre’s social function, its capacity to enable processes of self-fashioning for a range of playgoers, can hardly be overestimated. The intertextual framework of genre was key to enabling this. If the early modern repertory system created the conditions for a proliferation of texts, these were able to function in different ways for a variety of users. From a commercial point of view, the most important users were the audience. As Richard Preiss observes, “the play was not so much a commodity as a space for constructing one, and that commodity was the audience, the individual’s self-fashioning in relation to others and the crowd’s perception of itself as a whole” (*Clowning* 48). Audience members, at a time when markers of social distinction were undergoing shifts, were understandably invested in securing endorsement of their own identities and practices. The capacity of genre to function as a form of social action meant that it was able to play a key role in these processes of identity formation and self-fashioning. But this desire for self-fashioning which can be understood as a consequence of rapidly occurring social change also existed alongside a nostalgia for a more secure identity that was rooted in the past.

Although Fletcher posits the problem in terms of textual features and the theatre audience’s inability to recognize those pertaining to “tragicomedy”, much more than this was at stake. On the side of the audience, there may have been an investment in genre’s pseudo-memorial function but it was not simply a matter of nostalgia for nostalgia’s sake. It was the co-ordinates made familiar from pastoral plays which the playgoers were anticipating would enable them to make sense of the play. Without these, the play did not make generic sense. The play’s formal features were therefore not significant in themselves but only derived meaning from the generic and cultural associations which they prompted. The audience’s response can accordingly be understood through the framework of “the rhetorical and socio-cultural dimensions of genre” (Freedman and Medway 15-16). Fletcher’s deferral to the formal conventions underpinning tragicomedy, however, represents an unwillingness to engage with the significance of the cultural associations which genres can accrue. In effect, this was a

conflict between an author's imposed top-down understanding and an audience's more vernacular, empirically-based appreciation wherein form was subordinated to function.

Although theatre audiences had expectations with regard to particular genres, the satisfaction of those expectations was not to be attained by evaluating plays against a list of formal conventions. Rather, satisfaction was dependent on a desired end – perhaps a particular emotional response – having been achieved. Such desired ends can be understood as operating at times independently of genre conventions. Part of the appeal of a play like Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, for example, can be gleaned through the potential for vicarious enjoyment which the actions of the protagonist presented for the audience. In this way, it obviously delivered the emotional responses associated with tragedy, while departing from many of the conventions associated with that genre. This would have allowed the audience to accept that, while the Prologue had introduced *Tamburlaine* and invited the audience to "View but his picture in this tragic glass", the hero nevertheless escaped the usual fate of tragic heroes by remaining alive at the play's conclusion. In the case of *The Faithful Shepherdess*, however, not only were the formal conventions of English pastoral departed from, but the emotional engagement associated with that genre was also denied.

Given that playwrights and audiences are on opposite sides of the production/consumption divide, it is always a possibility that they will gravitate towards different uses of genre and have different understandings of the work performed by genre. Playwrights placed emphasis on the semantic and syntactic dimensions or the essential mechanics of how genres were constituted. Fletcher's description of pastoral tragicomedy was grounded in an understanding of genre as a formal entity. Playgoers on the other hand were concerned with how genres could be relied upon to engender certain responses, and this meant that their relationship to genre was founded in its rhetorical dimension. For playgoers, genres achieved pragmatic and inherently social ends. For playwrights, genres were essentially formal constructs. Correspondingly, Fletcher's prologue sought to address the problem encountered by the audience through an explanation of the play's formal features.

Fletcher's manoeuvre here is reminiscent of the effect generated by a celebrated moment in the Induction to Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour*. The chorus figures who dispute here include the "author", Asper, and "the author's friend, Cordatus. Having already seen the play, Cordatus observes that it is "strange and of a particular kind by

itself" (Ind. 227). The character of Asper – a surrogate for Jonson himself – is conscious of the merits of his play but fears that its very uniqueness may earn it a dire reception. Addressing those assembled as "Gracious and kind spectators", he nonetheless attempts to put distance between himself and their response: "I do not this to beg your patience, / Or servilely to fawn on your applause" (Ind. 50, 55-6). Consistent with this defensive posture, he proffers an explanation should the play not win favour with the audience:

We must impute to this only chance:

'Art hath an enemy called Ignorance' (Ind. 216-7)

It is a moment which emblemizes the peculiar nature of the playwriting enterprise. Jonson, like Fletcher in his preface, may wish to excoriate the audience but the reality of the commercial marketplace is that this audience cannot be ignored. Neither playwright, however much he may desire it, can afford to be completely detached from the audience upon which his livelihood depends.

It is not likely that Fletcher set out to deliberately confound the audience's expectations. However, his strategy of importing Continental tradition in order to create a play that was innovative did alienate an audience who were more familiar with the effects generated by a native dramatic tradition. It can only be surmised to what extent this outcome was inadvertent, and to what extent it was a direct consequence of a conscious attempt to garner approval from fellow playwrights. In *Volpone* (1606), Jonson had referenced the appeal Guarini held for English playwrights. Lady Would-Be's comment that "all our English writers, / I mean such as are happy in th'Italian, / Will deign to steal out of this author mainly" (3.4.86-8) suggests the snobbish appeal that Guarini held for a clique. But if Guarini can only be referenced by Italian speaking playwrights, the inference is that this Continental import is off-limits for a wider audience. This provides a context for Fletcher's referencing of the playwright, and suggests that it was to some degree motivated by a desire to attain peer recognition. Of course, he may not have anticipated that peer recognition and commercial success would in this instance be mutually exclusive. It is certainly unlikely that any playwright would deliberately set out to create a commercial failure in order to garner kudos from peers. But paradoxically, if snobbish appeal is only to be had at the expense of wider engagement, there is the possibility that a play's failure can then be reframed as providing a kind of validation.

The tone of Fletcher's response was defiant rather than apologetic and this suggests that he may have been to some extent caught off-guard by the audience's rejection, that he had overlooked their interests and was now not prepared to concede his oversight. Defensiveness also figures within the preface's implicit suggestion that the audience was not qualified in any case to judge the merits of the play. This defensive tone is duplicated in the commendatory verses, written by Fletcher's fellow playwrights for the play's quarto publication, which privilege the worthiness of aesthetic interests over more straightforward desires for entertainment. These verses thus make apparent a latent dichotomy between the interests of the theatre professionals and the interests of the audience. Audience rejection is accordingly reconfigured as a validation of the playwright's artistic principles and, by implication, audience approval signifies a refutation of the author's credentials. The testimonies that appear alongside the play in its quarto edition bear eloquent witness to the idea that the audience, rather than Fletcher, was at fault. Fletcher's play remains beyond reproach for this group who instead criticize the audience or, as Jonson would have it, "The wise, and many-headed bench, that sits / Upon the Life, and Death of Playes" (Kirk 2).

I argue that a set of cultural conditions specific to the period were at the core of the play's failure. Professional playwrights, working within an environment where there was an industry-driven proliferation of texts, were able to adopt a mode of writing that was intertextual. But if immersion in the theatrical environment created the conditions whereby this mode of writing was possible, immersion was also the requisite for unlocking it. Those most qualified in this regard were other playwrights. The proliferation of intertextual allusion thus produced a different outcome for playwrights and audience. Audiences, lacking the familiarity with a broad number of texts that the professional playwright had by way of immersion in the industry, could not hope to know all of the intertextual references presented. For audiences, the codes of recognizable genres provided a far more reliable blueprint for comprehension, and this demanded that attention be focused away from the identification of specific intertextual references. The significance of genre's pseudo-memorial function thus reasserted itself. At a historical moment when the category of genre itself was characterized by volatility, the audience was in need of familiar co-ordinates.

Unfortunately for Fletcher, Italian tragicomedy, a genre which the English audience was unfamiliar with, could not generate any culturally meaningful signposts. Some

indication of the divide separating audience and playwright is provided by the fact that, despite the popularity of Fletcher's plays at court over the ensuing years (Astington 224-7), *The Faithful Shepherdess* had to wait until 1634 and the reign of Charles I for a revival at court. The context for this revival, however, played upon rather than eased the source of the original tension. Scholars have situated this performance at Somerset House within a shift, inaugurated by Charles I and Henrietta Maria, towards "a theatre at court characterized by gentility, decorum and refined language" (Britland 59). Those elements which had been blamed for the play's original failure stood, in this new context, as signifiers for "the civilized cultural values [that Charles] wished to promote both at court and throughout his country" (Britland 63). Henrietta Maria's own continental provenance was probably not insignificant within this project of reform. Karen Britland, noting the Queen's influence in determining the drama for court entertainments, observes that "Henrietta Maria and her advisors chose to rehabilitate an old play in a manner that drew a direct comparison between the apparent lack of discernment of a former age and a new Caroline sensibility" (66). It may be that the play, by way of Fletcher's preface, had by the time of its revival become synonymous with elitist posturing. This feature, more than anything else, may have recommended it to the court of Charles I.

It is commonplace to understand the Renaissance as a period when different systems of values were brought into competition but, significantly, these systems of value were not always large scale. In this instance, the subsystem of value adhered to by authors working in close relation to each other came into conflict with that adhered to by the audience. Each group was invested in the drama to achieve different ends. If the playwrights' quest for innovation led them to subvert the audience's expectations, the audience's response was to rely increasingly on the coordinates offered by familiar genre conventions. The cues offered by the *Faithful Shepherdess* in this regard were misleading. Above all else, Fletcher's play was theoretically consistent with the pronouncements made by Guarini in the *Compendio della poesia tragicomica*, his defence of the tragicomic form. So while Fletcher also drew on classical sources, and an already significant vernacular tradition, it was the recent developments in Italian tragicomedies that provided the generic blueprint for the play. The audience, however, not knowing the relevant generic coordinates, sought to understand the play through what was familiar. Rosalie Colie's observation that genres represent "a set of

interpretations, of ‘frames’ or ‘fixes’ on the world” (8) is helpful in understanding the audience’s strategy. Recognizing a pastoral setting, the audience drew on knowledge of English pastoral as an appropriate frame through which to make sense of the play’s world. Fletcher, however, characterized this as a quest to find the “whitsun ales, creame, wassel, and morris dances” which for the most part are absent from his play. This, however, was to underestimate the power of the work done by genre. As Frow notes, genre “works at a level of semiosis . . . which is deeper and more forceful than that of the explicit content of a text” (*Genre* 19). The absence of the features noted by Fletcher did not diminish expectations for the tone of nostalgia associated with English pastoral. Of course, *The Faithful Shepherdess* did not deliver this, and Fletcher’s dismissal makes it clear that from his aesthetic point of view such details were reductive rather than enabling. But for the audience, such details gestured metonymically towards a wider generic backdrop which resonated with a set of cultural experiences. Fletcher attempted to amend his audience’s lack of understanding by announcing what should already have been apparent: that *The Faithful Shepherdess* was “a pastoral tragicomedy”. The fact that Fletcher has to make such a blunt assertion perfectly encapsulates the nature of the problem and throws into relief the extent of Fletcher’s deviation from his audience’s expectations. Because, as Saussure would have it, meaning exists only relationally, “the full significance of any entity or experience cannot be perceived unless and until it is integrated into the structure of which it forms a part” (Hawkes, *Structuralism* 7). Since the audience in 1608 did not know the precursor text or the genre, Fletcher’s play was effectively unmoored from a meaningful context. As part of a larger genre that was unknown, the play had no significance in itself. In this instance, genre was unable to accomplish the expected rhetorical ends and meaning broke down. It is little wonder that the people “began to be angry”.

### **Francis Beaumont’s *Knight of the Burning Pestle*: a satire on the audience**

Although it precedes Fletcher’s play, Beaumont’s *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* can almost be read as a dramatization of Fletcher’s complaints about his audience. The central conceit of Beaumont’s plot is that audiences will be guided by their own interests and concerns in their apprehension of plays, and that the intentions of playwrights will inevitably be of secondary importance. While this exemplifies the scenario that would later lead to Fletcher’s failure, ironically it also anatomizes the

reasons for the failure of Beaumont's own play. The social force of genre (Frow, *Genre* 102), is at the core of both playwrights' disagreements with their audiences. But whereas problems arose for Fletcher because the audience did not know the genre he was working within, the audience for *The Knight* were more than familiar with the Romance genre which Beaumont drew on. In this instance, the problem was the result of playwright and audience each having different conceptions, and desiring different uses from, the same genre. The genre thus became a source of division rather than of shared understandings.

Beaumont was, in fact, counting on his audience's familiarity with the conventions of Romance, and these conventions would have been familiar to Elizabethan and Jacobean audiences by way of a native tradition stretching back to Geoffrey of Monmouth's mythical accounts of Brutus and King Arthur. Helen Cooper, emphasizing the genre's cultural ubiquity throughout its "half millennium of . . . dominance", notes that by the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean periods, the form, while still retaining an immense popularity, had become "fashionable to sneer at" (36, 38). Perhaps contributing to its perceived decline was the fact that "its very popularity among a 'low' readership" rendered the romance aesthetic problematic for those keen to assert a more refined sensibility (Henderson 19). Although it is not possible, given the mutability of genres and systems, to infer transhistorical continuity, it is clear that the familiarity of certain conventions created the conditions requisite for redefinition or parody. But, given the associations which Romance had with populism, parody of it could not easily be distinguished from more class-based concerns.

If the issue of class was integral to Renaissance England, the practice of social demarcation was fraught. As Lawrence Stone has elucidated, new claimants for gentle status included "[s]mall merchants, shopkeepers in provincial towns, and minor officials in government" and, with time, it was inevitable that their hard work would grant them the means to affect the customs and values of the elite. Entry into the realm of the landed classes was, however, complicated by the fact that "the source of the wealth was just as important as the amount". Such claimants were thus "still below the line in public repute, and would hardly have considered themselves in a position to converse on equal terms with . . . a true landed gentleman or esquire" (Stone 50). In reality, the distance separating these claimants from their aspirations could not be bridged. At the theatre, however, stubborn lineaments could be to some extent suspended. There was, for

example, “the enthusiasm for plots of adventure” featuring protagonists who have been characterized as “prentice” or “merchant worthies” (Zitner 29, 28). These plays of citizen adventure, like Thomas Heywood’s *Four Prentices of London*, offered audiences citizen characters usurping the role traditionally reserved for knights in the romances of old. In this way the frustrations of the class system could be escaped, albeit temporarily.

Sheldon Zitner has observed that *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* is “better described as a delighted sharing of popular taste than as a moral or intellectual rejection of it” (31), but the play’s failure with its first audience offers compelling evidence that Beaumont’s manipulations of the topoi associated with the genre of citizen adventure were in some ways confronting. Once again, understanding genre by way of the social actions it performs is instructive. As Zitner concedes in a different context, “Beaumont is concerned with aesthetic rather than social ideas” (19), and I argue that Beaumont’s sensibility in this regard is central to understanding the split that occurred between playwright and audience. Beaumont was aware that the plays of citizen adventure held a social significance for the audiences who attended them. He was, however, not interested in satisfying that desire; if anything, he was interested in subverting it. Beaumont’s interest in the genre may have been primarily aesthetic but I argue that through this play he also mounted an attack on his audience’s social pretensions. This was, in effect, the source of the divide. It was a divide between the audience’s investment in the memorial function of genre and the playwright’s investment in the pseudo-memorial. The playwright was prepared to pursue this, even if it meant offending the audience and their social beliefs.

The Induction of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* sets the tone for the play. The Prologue, barely having begun speaking, is “interrupted” by a man from the audience taking issue with the scheduled entertainment. Suspecting that the announced play, “The London Merchant”, will be disrespectful of the citizen class to which he belongs, this archetypal “Citizen” proposes instead an extempore performance organized around some more appealing subject matter. Having declared himself a “freeman” and a “grocer”, “a member of a City guild who was an employer as distinct from an employee” (Gurr, *Playgoing* 53), this Citizen has in mind the kind of play that celebrates rather than satirizes the achievements of his class, something which is “notably in honour of the commons of the city” (Ind. 25-6). With the encouragement of his wife, he enlists the

apprentice Rafe and two further employees to fulfil this mandate. The protests of the Prologue: "O, you should have told us your mind a month since. Our play is ready to begin now" (Ind. 33-4), are to no avail. In the conceit that follows, "The London Merchant" is gradually overtaken by the Citizen's choice, "The Knight of the Burning Pestle". Throughout increasingly ridiculous scenes, Rafe becomes the titular knight who attempts to turn the tool of his trade, the grocer's pestle, to more heroic ends. In doing so, he corrects what he considers an omission in the literature: "I do not call to mind that I yet read of a grocer errant. I will be the said knight" (1.261-2). The contrived play thus draws shamelessly on the very Romance conventions which, for a fashionable and sophisticated audience, should have been a source of comic relief. Indeed, within an actual prentice drama, this is how such references would have functioned. Framed – or re-keyed – within a parody of a prentice play, however, it appears that this aspect of the prentice plays became unsettling. The problem was more than simply a residual affection for the genre of Romance. What Beaumont had revealed was that the very appeal of such plays was predicated on a contrivance which could not withstand scrutiny. The plays of citizen adventure, in being ostensibly parodic, inoculated audiences from the sneers of those who condemned Romance as a less than worthy genre. Simultaneously, however, they provided their audiences with escapism and actually enabled the kinds of emotional responses associated with the genre of traditional Romance. Audiences for citizen comedy were thus being granted the best of both worlds – it was possible to indulge a veneer of disdain for the conventions of Romance while at the same time participating in a contrived world of more innocent pleasures which it was no longer fashionable to visit. Inside the plays of citizen adventure, the world of Romance had been retained more or less intact. Beaumont's play punctured this bubble.

While Jacobean audiences were comfortable with metatheatrical effects, their tolerance for layers of farce was exceeded by Beaumont's creation. This was, after all, an age before the avant-garde. Audiences came to the theatre to be entertained and, at least to some extent, this involved losing themselves in the performance. Plays of citizen adventure may very well have afforded moments of vicarious pleasure wherein everyday realities were suppressed by more compelling flights of imagination. Metatheatrical effects ostensibly functioned to disrupt this engagement but, paradoxically, the theatre's power to command attention was made explicit in the

process. Thus, the audience became conscious of the theatre's capacity to create illusion at the very moment that they were jolted out of that illusion. Beaumont's strategy in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, however, is to deprive the audience of such illusion altogether. That is, the illusion of the performance is not simply interspersed with metatheatrical effects. Instead, the play revels in metatheatrical device from beginning to end. In being so obviously contrived, *The Knight* makes explicit the assumptions which bind the citizen adventure play to the genre of Romance. The citizens' intrusions suggest that the real appeal of the Citizen adventure plays lies in the way they deliver the kind of simple old-fashioned pleasures associated with the Romance genre. Playgoers attending plays of Citizen adventure were thus able to still forget themselves and participate vicariously in the action. The Citizen adventure plays, by way of a veil of mockery, merely legitimate engagement with a genre that was otherwise considered outmoded within fashionable circles. For the sophisticated, citizen adventure may have enabled the kind of emotional engagement that was associated with the now unfashionable Romance genre. Beaumont exposes the lie upon which the appeal of citizen comedy was based. That is, while formally distinct from the Romance genre, it was not distinct in the kind of affective response it generated. The rhetorical work performed, the social action, was essentially the same but it occurred by way of subterfuge. It was a genre which allowed the sophisticated to enjoy a sense of existing apart from popular taste while effectively participating in it. In effect, Beaumont directs his satiric darts at the audience's engagement, rather than at the form itself. The social action performed by the genre of Citizen adventure – the opportunity it presents for the aspiring merchant class to see themselves as above popular taste while participating in a form of it – is Beaumont's target. In mocking the audience's engagement with the genre of the citizen adventure, Beaumont shows that the playgoers' condescension towards Romance was merely a fashionable affectation. Although Romance and the plays of Citizen Adventure were formally distinct, they were performing the same kind of rhetorical work. The Citizen adventure genre appealed to identical impulses in the playgoer, and Beaumont's play exposed its spurious foundation. The game was up, and playgoers resented being caught out.

Like Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess*, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* would also be revived some decades later for the Caroline stage. Queen Henrietta Maria's Men performed Beaumont's play at the Cockpit in the 1630s and at St. James's Palace in 1636

and, as Eoin Price observes, “changing theatrical circumstances enabled Queen Henrietta’s Men to have success with a play which was once marketed as a flop” (48). By way of explanation, Price cites the very different repertory conditions which formed the background to the play in each of its theatrical incarnations. As Price puts it, “[i]n 1607, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* parodied a theatrical style which was very different from its own and from that of its repertory companions; in the 1630s, it alluded to plays in repertory performed alongside it” (60). If a play’s repertory companions can determine how it is received, this foregrounds how “genres are defined in relational terms” (Frow, *Genre* 125), and how shifting coordinates can effect changes in meaning. This also suggests how attributions of aesthetic worth can be informed by the “formal or informal hierarchies of value” that are specific to different cultural moments (Frow *Genre* 125). Inevitably, these would have shifted between the Jacobean and Caroline periods.

### ***Hamlet*: a new play within an old genre**

Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1600) is typically considered one of the early modern period’s most modern plays. It is certainly true that, like *The Faithful Shepherdess* and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, it was a new kind of play. But whereas Fletcher and Beaumont’s works self-consciously displayed their innovation, *Hamlet* is considered to be a revenge tragedy in outline. For its first audiences, therefore, *Hamlet*’s newness came concealed within a familiar form, and this familiar form was not parodied or subverted. *Hamlet*’s appeal is predicated on the mobilizing of audience expectations for a particular kind of drama, and the play’s adherence to convention may have contributed to its different reception. With *The Faithful Shepherdess*, Fletcher had disappointed his audience’s expectations in regard to Pastoral. Beaumont had similarly subverted his audience’s expectations with regard to Romance and Citizen Adventure. In contrast, Shakespeare harnesses rather than subverts genre expectations. Consistent with the tenets of modern genre theory, I argue that it is not possible to understand *Hamlet* outside of the genre systems in which it participates. Of course, the complexity of the interactions between the many and varied genre stakeholders means that it is not possible to fully identify the reasons why a particular generic experiment finds success. This kind of diagnostic tool is unfortunately not available. What is nonetheless clear is that, in its early modern moment, *Hamlet* satisfied audience desire for a particular kind of

emotional engagement associated with revenge tragedies. While *Hamlet* is a play which has retained appeal, it must be accepted that between the early modern and modern periods genre systems shifted considerably. With the passing of the cultural conditions which gave rise to the revenge tragedy genre, the significance of that genre for playgoers also receded. In this way, opportunities arose for *Hamlet* to be apprehended in new ways consistent with altered cultural concerns, and the quest for “an underlying psychological dynamic” (Guillory 83) has been identified as the most conspicuous of these. This way of reading *Hamlet*, however, was not available to an early modern audience.

For an early modern audience, *Hamlet* resembled a revenge tragedy. And while the genre of revenge tragedy lacked formal definition at this time, its lineaments were familiar through any number of popular plays. The markers of revenge tragedy promised a particular kind of visceral engagement and, once again, the kind of symbolic action performed by the genre of revenge tragedy is consistent with a particular set of cultural conditions. In regard to the revenge tragedy genre, and the relation which *Hamlet* bears to this, Derek Dunne has noted the importance of recognizing “the socio-political critique embedded in a genre rarely studied for its cultural commentary” (135). As Dunne observes, “such social commentary can easily be passed over if the genre is treated in isolation from its cultural context” and, without this context, “the central place of *Hamlet* in discussions of the genre” can skew perceptions (144, 132). The official response to private acts of revenge in early modern society was largely unequivocal – “[f]or the legislator revenge was repugnant to the natural law, while for the moralist it was considered barbaric” (Clare 6). Nonetheless, the Elizabethan state was invested in what Foucault would term “punishment-as-spectacle” (9). Torture and the various forms of execution perpetrated by the state had a *quid pro quo* quality that reflected the belief that “[b]esides its immediate victim, the crime attacks the sovereign”. Punishment in this context thus becomes for the sovereign “a way of exacting retribution that is both personal and public, since the physico-political force of the sovereign is in a sense present in the law” (Foucault 47-8). The displayed heads of executed traitors, which greeted anyone venturing near London Bridge and through the gates to the city of London, were conspicuous reminders of the sovereign’s power to exact this retribution. This disparity presented early modern London citizens with a seemingly insoluble paradox: personal acts of revenge were not to be tolerated but in

state-sponsored acts of punishment “there must always be a portion that belongs to the prince” (Foucault 48). Official discourse displayed no interest in addressing these kinds of lacunae but the theatre seized upon the potential they offered for compelling drama. For an early modern audience, the genre of revenge tragedy offered one way to think beyond official discourse. In this way, staged representations could have provided a release from a “burden of repression” that life in this society created (Clare 133). For Janet Clare, the appeal of revenge tragedies lies in how they “reveal and acknowledge the human capacity for acts of savagery and counteractive violence” (133). This human capacity is, of course, expressed variously by different cultures at different times. For those living in a culture that restricted “the psychic satisfactions of revenge” to all but the few (Greenblatt, *Norton* 1754), the visceral satisfactions offered by theatrical representation were a possible solution.

One play in particular was by way of its immense popularity metonymic of the theme of revenge. A product of the late 1580s, *The Spanish Tragedy* is considered “the first surviving revenge play of the new established commercial theatre” (Clare 18). Kyd’s play held great appeal in its own time and archetypal status did not take long to accrue. Shakespeare borrowed from it to write his own revenge tragedy, *Titus Andronicus* (1592), and his decision to return to the lineaments of Kyd’s play again with *Hamlet* suggests that the appeal of *The Spanish Tragedy* remained strong. References to *The Spanish Tragedy* are, indeed, scattered throughout early modern plays and it may have been that especially at this historical moment – *Hamlet* was first performed around 1600 – the older play was an appropriate reference point for a theatre characterized to some extent by retrospection. The end of the century was coinciding with the end of the Tudor dynasty, and the repertory of the Admiral’s Men at this time was comprised of revivals of older plays featuring the past century’s most famous tragic actor, Edward Alleyn (Menzer 184). The Chamberlain’s Men may have been similarly conscious of the need to cater to a pervasively nostalgic mood. A version of Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* “seems to have been in the repertoire of the Lord Chamberlain’s Men in the late 1590s” and Shakespeare’s colleague Richard Burbage – another exceptionally famous tragic actor – “was remembered for playing the part of Hieronimo” (Bate, Introduction 209). The publication of *Titus Andronicus* in a revised quarto version of 1600 also hints at the possibility that this play from the early 1590s was reprised on stage around this time. *Hamlet*, a play newly composed but in some ways backward-looking, may have

constituted part of the company's response. If the figure of Alleyn is likely to have stirred remembrance of a kind of theatre increasingly vestigial of a dying century, so too would the easily recognizable contours of *The Spanish Tragedy*.

The similarities which *Hamlet* bears to the period's most famous revenge tragedy are easily rehearsed. *The Spanish Tragedy* begins with the ghost of Andrea, *Hamlet* begins with the ghost of Hamlet's father. A garden is the setting for both the murder of Hamlet's father and, in *The Spanish Tragedy*, for that of Hieronimo's son Horatio. Hieronimo, as the Knight Marshal in charge of court revels, takes his revenge in Kyd's play through the guise of an entertainment at court. The same device of a play within the play enables Hamlet, a university student with an interest in English playing companies, to finally enact his retribution. There are of course differences between the two plays. Kyd's ghost is from the pagan underworld, Shakespeare's is from the Christian realm of purgatory. Kyd's protagonist, Hieronimo, is avenging the death of his son while Shakespeare's Hamlet is avenging the death of his father. But such distinctions do not undermine the basic assertion that *Hamlet* conforms to many of the conventions of revenge tragedy. Significantly, the innovations for which *Hamlet* is now famed occurred against a backdrop of easily recognizable parameters.

Despite *Hamlet's* indebtedness in this regard, John Guillory observes that "interpreters of *Hamlet* (especially in the twentieth century) have been less interested in explaining the violence of the play, which is of course a given of the revenge narrative, than in detecting an underlying psychological dynamic". For Guillory, "[t]he great critical motif of Hamlet's anticipatory modernity is founded on just the inadequacy of the ideas in the play to what Hamlet is presumed to be thinking, an inadequacy that opens up the space of his interiority" (83). Guillory's idea is a useful one, and it is worth considering the implications it has for understanding how *Hamlet* has garnered different responses in different historical moments. More specifically, it is worth considering how this idea intersects with the work performed by genre in aiding an audience to comprehend a given text.

For an early modern audience, those textual features relating to revenge would have been privileged in understanding the play. Catherine Belsey has suggested that Hamlet, in facing a moral dilemma, is a successor to "Mankind and Everyman, the heroes of the morality tradition" (Belsey, "Case" 130). This helps to explain why Hamlet's own ethical conflict is sometimes paid scant attention within the play for, as Belsey puts it,

“Elizabethan audiences . . . would not necessarily need a more explicit statement from Hamlet himself when the imagery and action of the play as a whole so emphasize the horror of revenge” (“Case” 143). While in this instance Belsey’s emphasis is on the meanings generated by “the play as a whole”, this is also an apt illustration of how a broader genre system aids an audience in the act of comprehending a text.

Effectively, larger generic understandings make it possible for much to be omitted. When a text makes generic sense, the necessity of explicit statements to explain aspects of plot or theme or character is always reduced. Genre, of course, always enables omissions because audiences do not need to be explicitly told what they have already learnt through exposure to other texts. Familiarity with the conventions of musicals, for example, will enable audiences to accept the kinds of effects – such as unmotivated singing – which would otherwise be regarded as unrealistic (Neale 31). Familiarity with the conventions of revenge tragedy, and more generally with the conventions of early modern drama, could therefore function in a similar way. What might strike modern audiences as overblown rhetoric or excessive displays of violence are likely to have been consistent with the expectations of early modern playgoers. For an audience familiar with the morality play tradition, such displays could have underscored the difficulty of the ethical predicament facing the protagonist. As a consequence, although modern audiences may find the conventions of the revenge tragedy genre less than compelling, these same conventions would have been central to an early modern audience’s understanding of the play.

Audience response is thus to some degree determined by a familiarity, or a lack of familiarity, with a given genre system. In being able to draw on their familiarity with a number of revenge tragedies, early modern audiences were afforded a nuanced way of apprehending and consequently had the potential for rich engagement. Situating the violence of the play and deciding its significance relative to other examples drawn from revenge tragedies was therefore a corollary. Given the tendency toward retrospection that characterized its historical moment, *Hamlet’s* early modern audiences may have been more interested in what they found familiar about the play rather than what they perceived as innovative. The play, like *Titus Andronicus* before it, is loyal to many of the norms inherited from revenge tragedies and, as Greenblatt observes, [t]hese plays generally share certain conventional assumptions” (Norton 1754-5). If *Hamlet’s* most important debt is to *The Spanish Tragedy*, citations to this play were so ubiquitous

within early modern culture that its characters and key concerns were generic flashpoints. Crucially, then, the older play was capable of gesturing to something larger beyond it, a tradition of plays with comparable concerns, and was thus capable of functioning as a cypher for larger generic preoccupations. Texts of course are always dependent on larger generic signposts, and it is in this sense that references to *The Spanish Tragedy* within other texts were able to fulfil a pseudo-memorial function. *The Spanish Tragedy*, while itself dependent on such signposts, had within its historical moment also become synonymous with them. Shakespeare's use of the older play therefore constituted an effective way to aid audience comprehension.

For early modern audiences, *Hamlet's* participation in a recognizable horizon of expectations would have underscored, or made apparent, formal overlaps which the play had with its predecessors. The play's deployment of rhetoric, particularly the bombastic tone associated with Revenge drama, is key in this regard. *The Spanish Tragedy* was especially noteworthy for the quality of its language, and the inflated style of its most famous speeches could invite parody. In *Every Man In His Humour*, Jonson has the town gull Matheo and the braggart soldier Bobadilla display a lack of refinement through their preference for Kyd over more up-to-date playwrights:

Indeed, here are a number of fine speeches in this book: 'Oh eyes, no eyes but fountains fraught with tears!' there's a conceit, 'fountains fraught with tears'. 'Oh life, no life, but lively form of death!' is't not excellent? (1.3.134-37).

But if the rhetorical style of Hieronimo's speech, which begins "O eyes, no eyes", was much parodied in the early modern period (Calvo and Tronch 192, n.1-4), Shakespeare in *Hamlet* turns it to different effect. Today, it is not necessary to have read *Hamlet* in order to know the "To be or not to be" speech. In the early modern world, the same might have been said of Hieronimo's soliloquy. Both speeches are highly rhetorical in style and, in each case, opening phrases are made memorable through the use of repetition and parallelism. Kyd's play, as well as being hugely popular on stage, was also much revised and reprinted, and critics beginning with Coleridge have noted the Shakespearean contours of some of its revisions. There may be good reasons for this. Building on a long tradition of scholarly arguments for Shakespeare's involvement, a convincing case has been made that it was Shakespeare who, around the turn of the century, provided some additional passages that were eventually published in a fourth

quarto of 1602 (Bruster, "Spellings" 424). This may help to explain why, although Kyd's play was much satirized, Shakespeare does not parody his predecessor's words in *Hamlet*. Any rhetorical resonance serves the purpose of highlighting thematic congruence rather than disparity.

If the case for Shakespeare's hand in *The Spanish Tragedy* is accepted, it is perhaps not surprising that there are also thematic resonances between it and *Hamlet*. It has been noted that another of Hieronimo's soliloquies from *The Spanish Tragedy* "is actually very similar to Hamlet's 'To be or not to be' soliloquy and may indeed have been a model for it" (Aggeler 327). In the speech in question, Hieronimo, motivated by the seeming impossibility of obtaining justice for the murder of his son, gives voice to his frustration. As Geoffrey Aggeler observes, "[l]ike Hamlet's soliloquy, it begins with a consideration of alternative responses to his situation – Christian patience or stoic resignation vs. active commitment against a sea of troubles", and is concerned with exploring the limitations of conventionally accepted responses (327). The dilemma confronting the protagonist is thus consistent with the concerns of revenge tragedy, and potentially symbolic of the limitations imposed by conventional forms of redress in the spectator's life. If revenge tragedy presented playgoers with a means by which they could relinquish a "burden of repression" (Clare 133), their willingness to engage with the drama in this way can be attributed to two causes. First, the response which the genre enabled was a kind of emotional compensation for the frustrations of life under an all-powerful Elizabethan state. A "close connection to other aspects of spectator life" is an important source of any genre's strength (Altman 188), and revenge tragedy clearly fulfilled this. Effectively, revenge tragedy functioned as a kind of balm to ameliorate the perceived inequality of the laws against revenge in early modern London. Second, there was the willingness of early modern audiences to sympathise with the protagonist and to accept the play's account of the inadequacies of official policy on the matter of revenge. This willingness was itself a response activated by the conventions of revenge tragedy. The same events, if depicted within a play participating in another genre, may not have garnered this response at all. The intertextual framework inherent within every revenge tragedy, in drawing the playgoer's attention to generic precursors, constituted an important justification for the protagonists' violations. Within these plays, forms of anti-social behaviour which were otherwise completely unacceptable were validated, and so the playgoer's sanction was achieved in

part by the force of generic precedent: Hamlet and Hieronimo could perform their acts of revenge because they belonged to a dramatic tradition. The cumulative force of the examples contained within this tradition endorsed the logic of the genre. The audience's willingness to accept protagonists who displayed anti-social tendencies was thus to a degree already predetermined. It was, more or less, what always happened in revenge tragedies. The pseudo-memorial function, by way of references to other texts, reminded playgoers of this. The similarities between Hamlet's and Hieronimo's speeches ultimately suggest that early modern playgoers were being presented with familiar generic cues.

But if early modern playgoers read *Hamlet* according to a familiar horizon of expectations, some of the play's departures from the conventions of revenge tragedy may have been all the more obvious. Dunne has observed that the protagonists of early modern revenge tragedies do not act, like Hamlet, as lone revengers but that instead "most revengers act as part of a group" (137). In addition, Dunne finds a point of distinction in the fact that, unlike Shakespeare's character, "stage revengers are for the most part drawn from outside the ruling elite" (137). While these departures from convention may have been readily apparent to early modern audiences, a critical tendency to view *Hamlet* as the culmination of the revenge tragedy tradition has meant that Shakespeare's protagonist has emerged as archetypal, and consequently "critics most often talk of the lone stage revenger as a staple of the genre" (Dunne 136). This again underscores the reality that reading positions have shifted and that Shakespeare's play is now perceived according to a different system of genre relations. Whereas once *Hamlet* may have been perceived as an outlier, it is now the central example. This modern critical conception of the genre is therefore inconsistent with the system of genre that existed in the play's historical moment, and accordingly it is not a conception that would have been useful to early modern playgoers.

For modern audiences, a lack of familiarity with revenge tragedy might reduce understanding of the genre to its obvious contours. Familiarity with traditions or subject matter, however, typically enable audiences the freedom to particularize. For the early moderns, the questions posed by revenge tragedy were gripping, and the genre's relevance to playgoer life was obvious. In effect, the limitations of the early modern legal system opened spaces of dramatic possibility which playgoers, by way of imaginative participation, inhabited alongside the protagonists of revenge tragedy who

enacted them. For the early moderns, the protagonist's situation was a consequence of externally imposed constraints, and the range of socially accepted responses to those constraints was limited. This meant that the protagonist's problem was not viewed as characterological in source. If imposed circumstances presented individuals with moral quandaries, the answers were to be found outside the self. The teachings of the church, as filtered through the morality play tradition as well as through the emerging science of casuistry, were in this sense a guide to ethical conduct (Belsey, "Case" 131). The audience's sympathetic engagement was mobilized in part by the fact that they too inhabited the protagonist's world and understood the constraints which confronted the character. A protagonist's moral dilemma was, at least theoretically, potentially soluble by way of recourse to prescribed laws and teachings, but the looseness of the fit invariably opened up morally ambiguous terrain. For Hamlet (as for Hieronimo), the familial obligation to enact revenge was pitted against the reality of proscriptions against it. As Belsey convincingly argues with regard to early modern ways of understanding *Hamlet*, the play's examination of such morally ambiguous spaces means that it is "proposing not an unequivocal moral statement but a case of conscience for the consideration of the audience" ("Case" 132). The audience in turn would have been able to appreciate the specifics of this case of conscience relative to other generically similar precedents. Thus, while the early moderns made sense of generic cues by way of different systems, it would be mistaken to claim that more straightforward readings were available to them. Ultimately, the impossibility of fitting Hamlet's situation neatly into a set of dramatic and theological precursors would have ensured the play's ambiguity.

In emphasizing the relationship that genres have with other aspects of "spectator life", Altman has observed how "generic meaning depends on correct alignment of text and audience". Taking the genre of medieval chancel drama as an example, Altman notes that "[t]o a non-Christian audience, chancel drama might make linguistic sense, but it would fail to make generic sense" (188). A parallel might be drawn here with *Hamlet*, for it is undoubtedly true that the appeal of a four-hundred-year old-play will only endure if it continues to make generic sense. It is not necessary, however, for the play to make the *same* generic sense. For Belsey, the tradition which informed early modern readings of the play is important because it can ultimately "extend the context for our understanding of the play" ("Case" 131). But the fact that *Hamlet* is now

understood by way of different genre systems limits the extent to which this aim can be attained. While a modern audience may be able to obtain an academic appreciation of the play in this way, the traditions no longer form a meaningful backdrop for a less formal engagement with the play's subject matter. For modern audiences, the coordinates by which the play was originally conceived no longer make generic sense. Dunne notes that "the shared ancestry of law and revenge has long been recognised by legal historians" but that literary critics typically adopt a binary approach to these terms (135). For early modern playgoers, however, this would have represented a false dichotomy. It also seems likely that *Hamlet's* first audiences understood the protagonist's utterances according to different frames of reference. Guillory contends that "Hamlet's philosophical ideas are at best echoes of Montaigne, and at worst quotations from a stock of knowledge common to the literate culture of the day" (83). Given the significance of *Hamlet* within the Western canon, Guillory's point that many of its protagonist's musings are far from original may at first appear surprising. However, appreciating Guillory's observation in the context of genre and genre systems means that accepting the claim does not mean a dismissal of the play itself. Guillory's claim is proof that utterances, if detached from the traditions which originally formed their backdrop, and which provided audiences with nuanced ways of understanding, can appear as little more than banal. For modern audiences, the solution to this has been to read *Hamlet* according to new genre coordinates and new genre systems. The significance of the Shakespeare canon has perhaps provided the impetus to do so.

This chapter began by referencing the claim that audiences, by way of the ritual function, are the ultimate creators of genres. *Hamlet*, a play whose meanings have shifted in accordance with the different genre systems through which it has been read, endorses this claim. The horizon of expectations established by a specific set of genre relations is key to making sense of any play. But the genres to which precursor texts belong do not always survive, and texts can cease to make generic sense. *Hamlet*, in its historical moment, was dependent on the genre of revenge tragedy – a genre far less significant today than it was in the early modern period. But *Hamlet* nevertheless continues to make generic sense. In fact, as the significance of the revenge tragedy motifs have receded, new spaces have opened up within the play. *Hamlet* may not make the same generic sense as it once did for audiences who were grounded in the Morality play and revenge tragedy traditions, but nevertheless it still makes generic sense. The

horizon of expectations has shifted as audiences have come to understand the play in line with new critical concerns, and broader theoretical movements. In particular, the theoretical advances associated with the twentieth century's psychological turn have inflected how the play is interpreted. It is audiences who negotiate the terms by which Hamlet's words are understood, and it is by way of this complicity that the character of Hamlet continues to command fascination. If Hamlet is not saying much that is new, his speeches nevertheless remain compelling. Genre, and the horizon of expectations, are key to this.

In this, lies the crucial distinction between the success of *Hamlet* and the failure of *The Faithful Shepherdess* and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. *Hamlet* provided genre markers with which its audience were familiar, and delivered on the expectations associated with these. *The Faithful Shepherdess* gestured towards a genre with which its audience was not familiar and then did not deliver on the expectations by which its audience sought to orientate itself. *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* gestured towards a genre with which its audience was familiar but self-consciously subverted the expectations associated with it. In avoiding these outcomes, Shakespeare was able to use the audience's acceptance of familiar conventions as the backdrop against which more striking innovation can occur. The social force of genre is dependent on the way genres work to elicit certain kinds of responses. An audience's relationship to a particular genre will of course be predicated on the particular kind of response that it is expected to generate. Just like Romance and Pastoral, then, revenge tragedy was a popular genre because it offered its audiences certain kinds of emotional satisfaction. It could be said that the persistent popularity of these genres was in part predicated on feelings of nostalgia.

If, as Greenblatt asserts, *Hamlet* is "an enigma" (Norton 1751), it is due in large part to the inscrutability of its main character. Hamlet's inability or unwillingness to provide in straightforward terms an account of the concerns guiding his behaviour is a large part of what makes the play compelling. But it is only through recourse to broader genre systems that audiences are able to satisfactorily fill these omissions. Shakespeare ensured that his original audiences were able to do this by drawing upon the formal features associated with revenge tragedy. Early modern audiences, reading the play according to the conventions of revenge tragedy and the philosophical ideas current at the time, would have found little to perplex them. Modern audiences, reading *Hamlet*

through the tenets of Romanticism or Freud, are similarly able to find orientation through familiar coordinates. In a sense, the play appears as able to assume as many guises as Hamlet himself. The play thus works with a shifting horizon of expectations which allows audiences interpretive scope. In the process, what is foregrounded is that meaning, rather than being intrinsic, is relational and dependent on shifting generic systems. Thus, if the concept of retrospection could function as the guiding trope for early modern audiences, the concept of introspection can work in a similar way for modern audiences.

### **Playwrights and the Uses of Genre**

By way of differences in reception, each of the texts discussed in this chapter illustrates “the strategic work accomplished by texts in particular circumstances” (Frow, *Genre* 115). It might be said more accurately that *The Faithful Shepherdess* and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* provide negative examples in that they underscore what happens when this strategic work is interrupted. In addition, this chapter has shown that relations between playwrights and playgoers could sometimes be fraught. At least part of this tension, I argue, can be traced to the Renaissance perception of authors as adepts within a tradition. The expectation, from playgoers and playing companies alike, that plays conform to type meant that playwrights themselves were in danger of being considered mere functionaries rather than aesthetically autonomous agents. Accorded little status by the culture at large, they could be marginalized even within the very industry that was dependent on their contributions. In contrast to the centrality of the author figure in modern culture, a historicized portrait of the Renaissance playwright renders a figure far less individuated, and for a scholar like Rosalie Colie the authors of the early modern period are best conceived as “generic authors”. Shared rhetorical formulae enabled collaboration, and collaboration was a mode of composition well-suited to a fast-paced theatrical environment. Helen Hirschfield suggests that such formulae also made possible what she terms “‘anti-self-fashioning’, a system of verbal mimicry by which each author eliminates his own playwrighting style in order to protect his linguistic signature from the collaborative endeavour” (*Joint Enterprises* 14). From the perspective of playing companies, all of this was commercially enabling. Playwrights were routinely commissioned to revise or augment the work of fellow playwrights, and this practice was made possible in no small part by shared generic

understandings. It is in this sense that early modern genre, as Colie would have it, is locatable “in the minds or models of generic authors” (Altman 84).

But if this was how the function of the playwright was perceived by the broader culture, many playwrights were already chafing at the inadequacies of the representation. Furthermore, despite the suggestion implicit in Colie’s characterization that playwrights were mere functionaries composing according to numbers, the emphasis on a shared rhetorical armoury did not obviate the development of individual style. If playwrights could at times engage in “anti-self-fashioning”, it was only because self-fashioning itself was possible. In reference to the second part of the Cambridge play *The Return from Parnassus* (1602) – a play that parodies those that wrote for the stage – Hirschfield observes that characters “censure” playwrights “in ways that indicate familiarity with generic as well as stylistic affinities” (*Joint Enterprises* 24). In considering the method of composition most likely deployed in this play, it has been observed that “[g]eneric, not personal, considerations seem paramount here, the style adopted suiting the shift of tone required for a new scene” (McMullan, *Late Writing* 249). This can suggest the impossibility of a writer’s development occurring in isolation from broader stylistic and generic issues, and underscores the fact that “the acquisition of a distinctive style is a cumulative, composite process of imitation of the styles of others” (McMullan, *Late Writing* 250). The ultimate end of imitation was therefore not the elision of a distinct identity but the development of one. If the doctrine of *imitatio* was an all-encompassing reality for Renaissance playwrights, there was nonetheless the freedom to perceive it as either constraining or liberating.

As Jonathan Bate observes, “[i]n Shakespeare’s own time the pleasures of discovering singularity in the plays would have been outweighed by those of recognizing exemplarity” (*Ovid* 198). Authors may have been more interested in exemplarity, but this was an “audience’s theatre” (Preiss 49). The process whereby this theatre would become an author’s theatre, however, had already begun. While this ascendancy cannot be ascribed to a single cause, I contend that one of the strategies adopted by Renaissance playwrights as a means of countering their cultural marginalization contributed to it. The idea of imitation as generative was very much a Renaissance norm and paradigmatic texts like Erasmus’s *de Copia* and Montaigne’s *Essays* epitomized the belief that “writers [could] assert and maintain their independence only by multiplying and fragmenting their models, thereby avoiding the dominance of one single precursor”

(Worton and Still 9). Accordingly, and perhaps in response to the constraints of an environment where the generic was valued, playwrights made much of this independence. It is unlikely, however, that such authorial stamps concerned audiences of the day. The succession of plays known variously as the “War of the Theatres”, the “Poetomachia” or the “Poets’ War”, in which playwrights parodied the styles of their contemporaries, provides a case in point. Hirschfield observes that, “the Poets’ War testifies to a belief – shared by the dramatists and posited for their audience – in the existence and distinctiveness of authorial style” (*Joint Enterprises* 26). But as Hirschfield is right to observe, what was shared by the dramatists was merely *posited* for the audience. In other words, the audience’s engagement was not dependent on their capacity to identify the authorial style being parodied. Although authors may well have had individual styles, and favourite intertextual allusions, the plays they created participated in a range of familiar genres. But if audiences were able to comprehend plays without recourse to authorial identity, among playwrights a subsystem of value which did take authorship into account was the corollary. Audiences may not have been concerned with the identities of those creating plays, but other playwrights were. For this group, a backdrop of generic uniformity gave rise to a situation where the unexpected was valued. Playwrights were thus able to vie with each other for two kinds of earnings: one material and dependent on the audience’s approval, the other symbolic and dependent on the approval of their peers. This chapter has examined the consequences of the playwrights’ divided interests.

The audience’s response to plays constituted one form of validation for playwrights but so too did the response of their peers. The word “playwright”, with its suggestion of someone who has wrought something, is helpful in understanding the orientation of these writers to their work. Since professional playwrights were invariably interested in a play’s formal aspects – in the mechanics of how the play attempted to achieve its effects – a degree of tension with the audience was inevitable. Usually this tension could be accommodated. Of course, in judging a play’s merits, playwrights were more likely to privilege formal conventions. One consequence of this was that intertextual references could be valued in themselves, rather than for what they signified. Understandably, the audience’s concern lay less with the formal aspects themselves and more with the possibility for vicarious engagement which those formal aspects created. The audience

thus granted less significance to the intertexts themselves, and more to the cultural import they signified, that which Altman would term their pseudo-memorial function.

### Chapter Three – The Companies

After a playwright had composed a play, the next step was performance. From the extant notes between Henslowe and dramatists, “now believed to be generally representative of arrangements between playwrights and companies in the theatrical industry”, Knutson establishes the following workflow: “the playwright wrote the play, members of the company heard some or all of it, they agreed to buy it” (50, 53). This chapter examines the significance of genre for early modern playing companies, and considers how playing companies in turn contributed to the processes whereby genres are reshaped and renewed. In doing so, this chapter contends that the contributions made by companies can be traced to the features - particular properties, venues, and actors - that were unique to their operations. In order to examine how generic material available to all could be imbued with proprietorial features and rendered unique, I draw on Erving Goffman’s concept of “keying” as a way of highlighting the role played by company-specific features and the contributions these made to processes of genre formation. Re-examining familiar narratives through the lens of the company presents the possibility of alternative explanations, and this is especially the case where discussion has previously been dominated by author-centric perspectives. Accordingly, I reconsider *The Winter’s Tale*, a play usually considered in biographical terms under the category of “late”, and locate alternative explanations for the generic features that mark this play.

Although the historical context of early modern plays is of much interest to scholars, the discrete orientation of early modern practitioners toward genre can be overlooked. To take one example, from the paucity of genre references in Philip Henslowe’s diary, Peter Berek infers that “generic categories were not very important in [Henslowe’s] practical theatrical life” (“Genres” 161). Further considering this scarceness in the context of the sixty percent of playbook title-pages which, in the period between 1590 and 1616, did make reference to genre, Berek contends that it “appears to be the case that generic terms are strongly associated with the culture of print, not performance” (“Genres” 174). While these surmises appear reasonable on the basis of the statistics, a questionable assumption inheres in Berek’s account. Berek presumes that Henslowe, whose diary was an *aide-memoire* not intended for anyone other than himself, made use of genre terms in ways comparable to stationers marketing playbooks. Berek’s quantitative approach, while ostensibly oriented towards the pragmatics of the period,

fails to take into account the different ways in which genre may have been conceived by different users and, more specifically in this instance, by a playing company manager. Consideration of the number of genre references in Henslowe's diary also neglects the significance of terms, like "Grecian comedy", "pastoral tragedy", and "jonson's tragedy", which suggest that the concept of genre was relevant to Henslowe. I consequently endorse a historicist approach but my discrete orientation is that the different perspective of early modern practitioners toward the concept of genre should also be revisited.

Although the idea that distinctions can be drawn between playing companies is consistent with the repertory approach to early modern drama, the concept of company style is a vexed one. Different versions of the phenomenon have been espoused, as well as some outright rejections (Craig and Greatley-Hirsch). Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean, in their study of the Queen's Men, point to the exceptional circumstances that surrounded that company's founding, as well as the unusually large number of actors within the casts for plays, as a way of accounting for the style implicit within that company's productions. A convincing case is made that the company's plays and visually oriented medley style of acting constituted a dramaturgy that would have been recognized as distinctive by audiences. Similarly, in Lawrence Manley and MacLean's study *Lord Strange's Men and their Plays*, an argument is made for the company's repertory being characterized, in plays such as *The Battle of Alcazar* and *The Spanish Tragedy*, by a "distinctively 'modern' geopolitical orientation' reflecting "the intellectual profile of the company's patron and [that of] its leading authors" (166). But the matter of company style is far from settled; scholars continue to posit different versions and hold different positions. Nevertheless, it must be conceded that while playing companies could not avoid sharing "the common practices and conventions necessary for making the profession's artistry intelligible to audiences" (Manley and MacLean 7), it is the case that "organizations within a profession always develop identities of their own, widely recognized features which stand out from the procedures they share with the other organizations (McMillin and MacLean xiii). Sigmund Freud's term for a different but in some ways related phenomenon was "the narcissism of small differences". The theory espoused by Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction*, that social identity depends on the assertion of difference and that this assertion is most pronounced

where there are otherwise similarities, is also helpful in understanding how companies working with the same generic material can nonetheless achieve points of difference.

Even if the personnel of playing companies were innocent of this version of narcissism, I contend that it still would have been impossible for companies to avoid inflecting generic material with qualities that were identifiably individual. If generic material available to all could be altered by way of its performance within a specific context, this can be understood as comparable to “the ‘regrounding’ of an activity in a context where it means something quite different” (Frow, *Genre* 46). The new context would here be provided by the material conditions and personnel that were unique to each company. Citation of familiar conventions within new frames is in many ways a familiar manoeuvre – even a joke told in different social contexts will assume different meanings (Chambers 3) – but as a way to think more specifically about what this regrounding can achieve within the context of genre, Frow cites the work of the sociologist Erving Goffman and his concept of “keying”. Frow is primarily concerned with the concept of “keying” with regard to the way texts are “constantly cited in other contexts” (*Genre* 46), and notes that the functions performed by citation and intertextuality are analogous to Goffman’s understanding that behaviours can assume different significances in different contexts (*Genre* 46). In an examination of Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*, I work with Frow’s idea in order to examine how “keying” may have enabled early modern playwrights the means by which to transform familiar conventions. What is important here is that this constituted a way for playwrights to expand the possibilities of different genres and reshape the audience’s expectations with regard to the function of specific devices. Rekeyed within a different context, a familiar device could be rendered capable of generating surprise once again and, working in this way, playwrights participated in processes of genre formation. Beyond this, and more generally, I further contend that the concept of “keying” is helpful in understanding how playing companies were able to share generic material but render it distinct in the act of performance. The performance situation of each playing company therefore represented a unique frame through which generic material could be “keyed”. In the context of genre, I suggest there are good reasons for understanding the phenomenon of regrounding by way of the contributions made by playing companies.

## The Elision of the Company in Shakespearean Criticism

*Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest* are four plays typically considered apart from the others in the Shakespeare canon, and G. K. Hunter has noted that these four plays “are not only closely related to one another in structure but are different from all the comedies he [Shakespeare] had written before” (*English Drama* 502). In this chapter, I focus on *The Winter's Tale* and situate Shakespeare's deployment of tragicomic, romance, and pastoral elements in the “late” plays within a broader argument wherein factors specific to the King's Men are understood as influences on the writing practices of playwrights. The traditional approach to these plays, however, is very different. In the nineteenth century, Edward Dowden's application of the term “Romance” to these four plays was instrumental in the emergence of a discrete category within the Shakespearean canon. Temporally distant from the original historical moment, Dowden was not especially concerned with locating points of convergence between the plays of Shakespeare and those of his contemporaries. Attention was focused instead on the Shakespeare canon and on the figure of Shakespeare himself, and this typically meant the exclusion of broader frames of reference. Dowden's classification, however, has also encouraged consideration of Shakespeare as a writer distinct from his contemporaries. Working from a biographical stance, Dowden sought an explanation for certain stylistic features in these works and found it through the construction of an idealized portrait of an artist approaching retirement. The resulting conflation of biography with genre is a critical tendency that has persisted. Although the drive to treat the “late” plays of Shakespeare in this way is a retrospective critical intervention, it has meant that these plays are typically treated apart from not only the Shakespeare canon but also the broader canon of Renaissance drama. This author-centred approach neglects the significance of the company and how this too influenced the style of these plays.

Arguably, rather than enabling broad discussion, terms such as “Romance” and “Late” narrow the frame of reference and impart a mystique which runs counter to the more objective aims of material research. As a corrective, Philip Edwards has invited speculation as to “what criticism would have made of these plays, or any one of them, if all Shakespeare's other plays had been lost” (qtd McDonald, *Late Style* 15). Without the prestige conferred by a canon and an established chronology, the same value may not have been ascribed to these plays, and this draws attention to the way that unexamined

cultural assumptions can be implicit within judgements of Shakespeare's works. As Frow notes more generally, "[c]riticism is part of the literary system, and any reading either supports a normative regime of reading or disrupts it" (*Marxism* 101). These plays are now generally perceived as the culminating works of England's national poet, and the value assigned them is almost inseparable from the teleological significance that their lateness confers. As a corollary, the Shakespeare canon itself functions as a kind of literary criticism because it perpetuates Shakespeare's exceptionalism; labels like "Romance", and "Late", can be understood as functioning in the same way. Understanding the genre of these plays through the company can disrupt this more settled approach.

If Dowden's manoeuvre shifted critical attention to those features which marked the plays as distinct from others in the Shakespeare canon, the Shakespeare canon had of course to be first inscribed before this demarcation could occur. In contrast, the points of coherence which these plays shared with others in the repertory are likely to have been far more conspicuous in their original historical moment. But the values held important by early modern playing companies, which were inscribed in the genres of the time, were ultimately to be superseded. In the centuries to come, the Enlightenment's privileging of neo-classical correctness and craft gave way to Romanticism's idealization of the untutored and natural. As numerous accounts have shown, the cultural prominence of Shakespeare was eventually secured by matters largely peripheral to the texts themselves. Revisiting an earlier context centred on the pragmatic concerns of theatre stakeholders therefore involves acknowledging that a different set of interests shaped the plays upon their first appearance, and this perspective offers a critical distance that is potentially productive. In contrast, privileging the author through terms like "Late" or "Romance" necessarily obscures these other ways of seeing the plays. In this context, critical debates about which is the more appropriate term are bound to founder because these terms are only nominally generic categories. The question of whether the epithet "Late" or "Romance" should be applied is not an especially significant one because, in effect, neither term involves a major realignment of critical perspective. These terms take the individual author as their primary concern, and a teleological inscription of Shakespeare's pre-eminence guides the process. As retrospective interventions, such terms are necessarily at odds

with the prospective orientation of the repertory environment which enabled the plays to be produced in the first place.

The perceived singularity of these plays within the Shakespeare canon can therefore obscure other potentially productive ways of approaching them. The significance of Beaumont and Fletcher's innovations within the King's Men's repertory has been well documented and, as playwriting peers, their influence on Shakespeare cannot easily be dismissed. Accordingly, I take *The Winter's Tale* as a paradigmatic example of how Shakespeare was able to integrate the innovations of his peers while avoiding the risk of slavish imitation. In doing so, he was able to conform to the dictates of a particular repertory moment, creating plays that were consistent with others in the repertory of the King's Men. I here suggest a correlation between matters pertaining to the company and the processes of genre formation. I also argue that the stakeholder position of companies was unique and that these institutions used genre in ways that were consequently suited to specific needs.

### **The Significance of Genre to the Company "Brand"**

In an age before the invention of copyright, any aspect of a performance would have theoretically been open to appropriation. Given this, it might be assumed that playing companies were little concerned with differentiating their plays from those of their rivals. I contend, however, that although early modern theatre existed in a world where everything was theoretically sharable, the absence of copyright laws did not in effect confer this reality. While there may have been fewer legal obstacles preventing the appropriation of rival companies' successes, proprietary interests could still intrude. Knutson stresses the fraternal nature of the relations between early modern theatre companies, persuasively arguing that this model of conducting business was a consequence of a direct lineage to the guild organizations. According to Knutson, "[w]ithout a court system and officers of a livery company to adjudicate and enforce acceptable behaviours, players in the 1570s and 1580s developed guidelines for themselves, one of which was that a company should not acquire a script of another company and perform it as its own, even when that script had been published" (*Companies* 42). Also, as Richard Dutton notes, "[w]hen the Master of the Revels granted a licence to perform a play it was specific to the companies which acquired it and could only be passed on to others with their consent" (cited Brooks, *From Playhouse*, 58). As a

consequence, each company would have conceived the necessity of commissioning and producing their own original works.

Peter Happé also notes that the financial system that emerged for the professional stage was “a direct development of the medieval guild structure” and that in systematizing “the need to please audiences . . . it helped to set up a remarkable feature of the Elizabethan stage: the sustaining of certain well-trying plays” (188). But while there were plays that audiences liked to see again and again, the size of the theatre-going population in London placed constraints on how often these could be returned to the stage and these conditions also help to explain why, when plays did return, they were frequently revised or amended. The practical solution to this problem was to identify the commercially viable elements of plays like *Mucedorus* and *The Spanish Tragedy* and transpose them into new plays. I draw a comparison here with the practice of Hollywood film studios wherein producers, necessarily interested in capitalizing on the success of past box office sensations, have an interest in duplicating specific elements which have been deemed successful in the past. Those involved in production inevitably approach genre in a way that is coloured by the uniqueness of their position. In being oriented toward the future, the producer’s stance is not like that of the early modern or modern critic whose main concern is finding explanations for what had already occurred. The focus for producers is therefore not so much on genre categories – typically a critical concern – but on “cycles”. Altman has explored the significance of the cycle with regard to the genre formation processes inherent in the Hollywood production model and, although there is no straightforward equivalence between Renaissance theatre production and Hollywood film practices, some of this same logic applies. Consequently, I borrow the term “cycle” as a helpful way of understanding the imperatives to which those involved in the production of plays were responding. The Chamberlain’s Men, for example, at some point acquired the play now known as 1 Henry VI in order to complement two other plays – now known as 2 and 3 Henry VI – that were already in their repertory. A company’s need to establish a cycle, by taking generic material and inflecting it with pseudo-proprietary qualities, can therefore be understood as part of the engine driving early modern theatre production; something which, in a different context, Altman terms “genrification”. In other words, if whole plays could not be appropriated, successful features could at least be “borrowed”. Accordingly, while a figure like Henslowe may not have made any substantial use of

genre terminology in his diary, he and others in comparable roles must still be considered important stakeholders in any complete narrative of Renaissance genre.

If genre is “an inherently shareable property”, early modern playing companies were creative in finding ways to render it more proprietorial. In a number of ways, therefore, matters pertaining to the company prompt consideration of how companies had recourse to something akin to the modern-day concept of branding. As the savvy consumer knows, the differentiation suggested by branding is itself often illusory: any product within a given category, regardless of maker, should be able to meet basic use requirements. But where it does not signal any substantive point of difference, the concept of branding may be all the more important, and this was arguably the case in an environment like the early modern theatre where everything was theoretically shareable. The flag that flew high above the Swan Theatre, as immortalized in the famous sketch by the Dutch tourist Johannes de Witt, suggests that early modern theatre companies had recourse to what are now recognizable marketing practices. It is reasonable to infer that the names of playing companies, or the symbols used in lieu of these names, could prompt associations for playgoers and that these associations would enable points of distinction to be drawn. In this way, the generic landscape would be qualified because a comedy by the Chamberlain’s Men and a comedy by the Admiral’s Men would mean two different kinds of play.

The material constraints under which companies worked necessarily affected the kinds of plays that could be produced in order to turn a profit. In reference to the Admiral’s Men repertory of 1595-6, Knutson notes the influence of commerce in such features as “the duplication of popular subject matter, the extension of that matter into sequels or serials, and the expansion of a popular figure into a spin-off” (*Companies* 57). While each of these features is in theory sharable, in practice there would have been limitations on appropriation and, inevitably, borrowed features would receive more or less emphasis as they were transplanted from company to company. It is therefore important to note that, although the matter of genre may not have been an overriding concern, the emphasis on establishing cycles inevitably informed the processes whereby successful genres were established. In what follows, I identify what the limits on appropriation were, and explore these under the organizing banners of “players”, “playwrights”, and “venues”. Stability in these areas – longstanding troupes of performers; playwrights with shareholding interests in the company; permanent

performance rights in particular venues – conferred upon companies the capacity for individuation. If actors, playwrights, and venues were key to the operations of companies, a company “brand” can be understood as an emanation of the talents and characteristics inherent within these human and material resources.

### **The Significance of Players – Kemp, Alleyn, the “little eyases”**

Richard Preiss has made note of the “sharply defined production categories around which modern theatre would coalesce: the author, and the actor” (11). In appraisals of early modern theatre, however, the significance of actors can sometimes be overlooked, and consequently their contributions to processes of genre formation can also be obscured. As a way of redressing this, the associations between early modern authors and actors offer a productive field of enquiry and, in assessing the contributions these actors made, emphasis falls logically onto the playing companies to which they were contracted. Each repertory company, by way of economic necessity, worked with a regular group of actors. While this was the only way to enable the required pace of production, the persistence of certain personalities across different plays exerted its own influence. If in the realm of film, the names of modern-day stars can sometimes “guarantee a certain style, a particular atmosphere and a well-known set of attitudes” (Altman 25) – qualities typically associated with authorship – there is a potential analogy to be drawn with the performers of the early modern theatre and the significance which they held for playgoers. As Michael Bristol observes, “[t]he most prominent players in the early modern entertainment business are not only purveyors of cultural products, they are themselves extremely valuable commercial properties” (35). Actors able to inflect performances with a “trademark” attitude or style, for example, could be especially useful in asserting proprietary interests. Accordingly, the way companies treated generic material was inevitably influenced by the capabilities and the unique qualities of the actors that performed as part of their troupes. A necessary corollary is that, in the case of a playwright like Shakespeare whose company shareholding afforded him stable conditions of production, composing without specific actors in mind would have been an impossibility.

Will Kemp, through his mastery of the jig, was almost indissociable from the Chamberlain’s Men in the 1590s and, on the basis of the form’s “capacity for serial elaboration”, has been assigned a quasi-authorial role (Preiss 148). Noting that “jigs

might be treated as company assets, indeed, no different from plays”, Richard Preiss finds a point of comparison with “the Shakespearean history plays they might have concluded” (148). Kemp departed the company in 1599 and after this date there was a phasing out of the jig from the Chamberlain’s. Kemp’s subsequent venture, an attempt to morris dance from Norwich to London, was only a qualified success. However, that it was conceived and attempted at all – and documented in the self-penned account *Kemp’s Nine Days Wonder* – is testament to the fame Kemp had acquired with the Chamberlain’s Men. For the Admiral’s Men during the same period, Edward Alleyn is likely to have been similarly emblematic of tragic subject matter. According to Paul Menzer, part of the company’s strategy at the turn of the century as they transitioned from the Rose to the Fortune Theatre was to capitalize on Alleyn’s familiarity to an already existing audience. Thus, the Admiral’s repertory in the early 1600s was characterized by revivals of older plays. Alleyn, then in his early thirties, had come out of “retirement” and “many of the dramatic warhorses unstabled on his return featured him at the reins” (184). Having acted in plays such as *Tamburlaine* and *The Spanish Tragedy*, Alleyn’s name alone is likely to have stirred generic expectations. In ways such as this, the star actors of the early modern period, who ostensibly served the interests of the companies for whom they performed, were also capable of influencing the mechanisms whereby genres emerged or were modified.

The intersection between genre and company personnel is exemplified in some allusions within *Hamlet* to the vogue for child actors that ensued following the reopening of the private playhouse at Paul’s in 1599/1600. Knutson notes that “there are two passages in texts of *Hamlet* that allude to the boys’ players” and in reference to Q1 observes that “[i]n the context of an expanding public theatre and a renewed children’s one, it is plausible that Shakespeare, in his new version of the old *Hamlet* story, conceived a scenario in which a men’s company . . . would be driven out by a company of boys” (“Falconer” 11). In the Folio version, Shakespeare draws on his audience’s presumptions about the different styles of performance offered by playing companies when he has Hamlet, keen to be updated on the London theatre scene, ask Rosencrantz and Guildenstern about a favourite London company– “Do they hold the same estimation they did when I was in the city? Are they so followed?”. And Rosencrantz’s reply – “No, indeed they are not” – may well have elicited a laugh of recognition from the Globe audience. For, as Rosencrantz goes on to say, the success of

the children's companies had drawn spectators away from Hamlet's beloved troupe, those previously celebrated as "the tragedians of the city" (2.2.326-64). As Harold Jenkins notes, those in the Globe audience, at least those willing to indulge the conceit, may have had reason to think of a company like the Children of the Chapel who "began to act at the Blackfriars theatre towards the end of 1600" (255, n337). Presumably, the different style of acting and the novelty offered by the boys' companies could have presented Hamlet's favourite players with stiff competition.

Explaining the success of the children's troupe by way of a recognizable company "brand" seems straightforward in this instance. Hamlet's favourite players were, after all, free to perform satires if they wished. But attempting to emulate the success of "the little eyases" through a strategy of generic identification would, on its own, have been insufficient. While these imagined players were free to borrow aspects of the children's performances, they were not children themselves, and therefore the capacity to emulate the children's distinctive brand of satire was not an option. The children's company in this instance would have had the advantage because, in a commercial repertory environment, what is most valuable is that which is readily identifiable and marketable. What is at stake in this kind of repertory environment is therefore a particular version of genre, and this version of genre is most readily identifiable by way of the actors performing it. The significance of actors in this period means that modern understandings about the relationship between actors and playwrights must be revised. As Preiss puts it, "it was dramatic authors who began as anonyms . . . it was the comedians, like Richard Tarlton and Will Kemp, who were the first celebrities of the early modern stage" (6). Nor should the famous tragedians, like Richard Burbage and Edward Alleyn, be overlooked. But whatever the genres of specialization, the pull of celebrity was key to the success of the companies. While all companies were free to produce comedies, in the 1590s only the Chamberlain's Men could have produced one with Will Kemp. Only the Lord Admiral's Men, and for a brief period Lord Strange's Men (Manley & MacLean 54-8), could have produced a tragedy with Edward Alleyn.

The assertion that the works produced by playing companies in the early modern period were distinguishable on the basis of "trademarked" styles can thus seem almost axiomatic. The example provided by Guildenstern's reference to the "little eyases", albeit fictionalized, suggests an underlying reality. Even in a pre-copyright era it would not have been possible for a company to appropriate everything about a rival

production. A company's own material and human resources would have set limits on this. And this, in turn, suggests something key about the processes of genre formation. While genres were inherently shareable, the companies' responses were individuated as a consequence of discrete features which could not easily be duplicated. Winning generic formulas were therefore adopted only to be adapted, reshaped by the different performance conditions specific to each company. Multiple expressions of popular genres would have resulted, each inflected differently according to the specifics involved in the production of plays for each company. The playwrights who composed the plays, the troupes who performed them, and the venues where the plays were performed all had an effect.

### **Shared Interests: Playwrights and Players**

Paul Yachnin has observed that "play production is an irreducibly material process of shared, coordinated effort" (311), and this can create any number of results. Writing in the context of classical Greek theatre, an extremely codified art-form, P. E. Easterling notes that it was not any "'artificial' three-actor rule [preventing dramatists] from doing anything they wanted; the main challenges to their freedom may indeed have come . . . from the emergence of leading actors as 'stars' who made their mark on the tradition in decisive ways" (153). If classical dramatists were more beholden to the stylistic preferences of the actors performing their works than to any set of received generic conventions, it may well be constructive to think of the relationship between early modern playwrights and actors in comparable terms. This scenario might be especially applicable to a company like the King's Men in light of the relatively stable nature of the working conditions it enjoyed. As the example of Shakespeare proves, leading actors or playwrights for the Chamberlain's and later King's Men could also be company shareholders, and the stability inherent in this arrangement was a factor influencing aesthetic outcomes over time. If actors could be associated with playing companies, in the case of the King's Men there was thus also the opportunity for working relationships to develop between actors and playwrights.

Given the closeness of the working conditions that prevailed in the early modern theatre, playwrights could hardly have avoided writing with the qualities of specific actors in mind. As Ian Donaldson notes, "[a]udiences would often have been drawn to the theatre to see a star performer in action, such as the great Edward Alleyn, rather

than to view the work of a particular author, of whose identity they would in most cases have been unaware" (*Ben Jonson*, 107). This is borne out by the fact that, after Kemp's departure from the Chamberlain's, Shakespeare's treatment of the clown figure was to undergo a marked shift. Kemp's replacement, Robert Armin, made an equally distinct contribution to the company and, it has been argued that Shakespeare's representations assumed new contours in response to the talents of this actor. *Twelfth Night* (1601), which featured Armin in the role of Feste, is marked by the inclusion of songs which "may constitute the comedy's most direct debt to Armin as a contributing author" (Elam, Introduction 135). Shakespeare in this instance appears to foreground the company's interests above his own claims as a playwright, privileging the relationship which the clown figure had with the audience while allowing Shakespeare the author to recede into the background. This is consistent with Preiss's synoptic assessment that "early modern theatre starts with clowns and ends with (or at least ends gesturing toward) authors" (7). Playwrights and performers, and the relationships that were sometimes formed between them, were in these instances intrinsic to company fortunes.

In the context of an early modern veneration of a rediscovered Classical inheritance, the Aristotelian concept of *ethos* suggests a framework for understanding how the talents of particular individuals could have come to be perceived as almost synonymous with companies. In light of the shifting valences of *ethos*, it has been observed that "[w]hen Aristotle used the word, *ethos* meant the proof brought about by the character or virtue of the speaker, and revealed in his speech" and that accordingly "the concept of 'image'" can be understood as "a modern version of *ethos*" (Cockcroft 28, 30). Thus, while early modern companies may not have employed terms like "brand" or "image" familiar from modern marketing methods, the philosophical tenets underpinning these ideas would not have been alien. This way of understanding early modern theatres is consistent with the commercial realities that governed their existence. If success in a competitive marketplace depends on points of distinction, it is reasonable to assume that significance will be ascribed to what cannot be easily imitated by rivals. "Trademark" actors would have been one way of ensuring this, but companies would have looked for other ways to safeguard their "brand" within the marketplace. The logical inference is that the way various properties were combined by different repertoires could have produced winning formulas. Understood in this way, the

combination of a character like Falstaff, a product of Shakespeare's artistic sensibility, with Will Kemp, an actor famous for his interpretive talents, would have constituted a quasi-proprietary property for the Chamberlain's Men.

### **The Significance of Venue**

Just like other material conditions, the spaces in which companies performed were significant in that they either enabled or limited aesthetic possibilities. If the large troupe that constituted the Queen's Men enabled that company to treat historical subject matter in a way which emphasized points of large-scale conflict, the performance venues were integral to the effects created. There can be no doubt that the spaces in which companies performed their plays would have influenced the aesthetic choices available. Each company worked with a particular set of material conditions and this meant that, over time, plays were modified by the conditions of their performance. Given this, it is not hard to understand why spectacle rather than dialogue was the keynote of Queen's Men productions. If the plays of the Queen's men emerged from a particular set of staging possibilities, it would not have been possible to radically alter the conditions of performance without altering the plays themselves.

If a play like *The Famous Victories of Henry V* could not have been easily accommodated to a venue like the Blackfriars with its stage "less than half the size of the Globe's" (Gurr 38), a staple feature of King's Men productions was their capacity to be performed at both the outdoor Globe and the indoors Blackfriars. This, however, does not mean that the performance and reception of these plays were unaffected by the different conditions. As Andrew Gurr notes, "[a] large open auditorium . . . would certainly generate a level of background noise much greater than . . . the hall playhouses" (43) and this, together with the fact that much of the audience were visible to each other, exposed to the elements and in broad daylight, would have created a set of conditions capable of influencing the audience's reception of various performances. With respect to the late plays, Raphael Lyne has noted that "[t]he plays posit things in which one might believe, and the ironic tools to doubt them", and that the key concepts to consider in relation to this irony are philosophical scepticism and metatheatricity (8, 9). The statue scene of *The Winter's Tale*, for example, is one "where the prosaic view is available, but so are transcendence and wonder" (38). In considering how the emphasis afforded each of these orientations towards dramatic representation was

determined, I suggest that the conditions inherent in each performance venue itself would have been crucial. Simon Forman famously made no mention of the statue scene in his account of the production he witnessed at the Globe. In such an environment, scepticism rather than wonder may very well have been the keynote response. The important point is that, although venues like the Globe and the Blackfriars would have enabled different responses, the “late” plays could have been effectively staged at either one. The conditions encountered at the public amphitheatres may have foregrounded the metatheatrical devices employed by these plays, perhaps distancing the audience from the action at key moments, whereas the representational capacities of candlelit indoor venues may have made possible the suspension of disbelief upon which immersion in the fictional worlds of these plays is predicated. The dialectical tension between scepticism and belief which underpins these works may well suggest how they were accommodated satisfactorily to both styles of theatre.

Gurr goes as far as to suggest that “[t]he unique reputation that the King’s Men [ultimately] built for themselves . . . was largely based on the esteem the Blackfriars acquired as the most prestigious place for playgoing in the country” (30). It is certainly uncontroversial to suggest that explanations for the kinds of play produced by the King’s Men in this period can be satisfactorily found in the performance conditions unique to the playhouses for which they were intended. Shakespeare’s “late” plays, especially, must be understood as having emerged from a repertory moment which coincided with the King’s Men’s inaugural performances at Blackfriars, a period when Shakespeare “began to write plays of a quite different type” (McMullan, Introduction 113). The implacability of practical constraints adumbrates the theatre industry’s distance from the theoretical concerns of a figure like Sidney. Instead of genres characterized by a “single tonality” by way of their emphasis on didacticism, the genres of the public stage instead display a “multivocality” (McDonald, *Bedford* 171). This multivocality was a consequence of the creative solutions which companies found to the problems inherent in presenting plays on stage. In the case of the King’s Men, the availability of the venue at Blackfriars from 1608/9 can be understood as a determinant on the kinds of play produced, and ultimately a factor influencing perceptions of the company.

## **Shakespeare and the Tragicomedies of Beaumont and Fletcher**

In this chapter, I have thus far advanced the argument that companies combined the material and human resources at their disposal in order to attain an advantage over their competitors. How a playwright worked with a particular set of actors, how the performance space of a given venue was used for dramatic effect, and how the proprietor of a given company made decisions about the kinds of play to produce by privileging certain features over others, are all relevant in this regard. These processes are understood as being inseparable from the operation of genre, since it was the responses made by various companies to familiar genres which created the conditions for variation and innovation. I now build on these presuppositions in order to posit the significance of the working relationships that existed between playwrights. What forms the object of enquiry in this instance is how Shakespeare as a working playwright used the innovations of his fellow writers – all of them company shareholders – and combined them with his own strengths as a dramatist in order to produce plays consistent with the company's new cycle. The corollary is that the working relationships between playwrights, which in the short term might be construed as a matter related to the company alone, are also implicated in the processes informing genre formation.

Knutson argues the inevitability of company expectations, that dramatists “duplicate the successes in other companies’ repertoires, both in subject matter and form” (*Repertory* 66). But playwrights would have also wished to emulate the success of their peers working alongside them. The emphasis of course was on producing successful plays and, regardless of provenance, recognizable combinations of subject matter and form would have provided the blueprints for this undertaking. It is also likely that shared working conditions figured in this process of assimilation. It is only to be expected that familiarity with other playwrights and their habitual ways of working would make it easier to glean patterns in their work. Playwrights within the repertory theatre environment thus had opportunity to respond to the particular rather than being simply focused on repertory-wide trends. This may also have contributed to the generic diversity that is a marked feature of the plays produced within the repertory theatre environment. Writing in reference to theatre history in his *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre*, David Duff observes that “[c]ommercial success in the sphere of drama, if we exclude repertory theatre, was confined mainly to popular genres” [3]. The plays of the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras are of course characterized by conditions of

production specific to repertory theatre and, within this medium, writers were not constrained by any injunction to create plays which participated in popular genres. In addition to the close working conditions between playwrights, the imperative to generate original material gave rise to an environment where generic change was both inevitable and rapid. Russ McDonald rightly observes that “[t]he presence of three generic divisions in the Folio does not mean . . . that Shakespeare’s contemporaries were unable to conceive of other dramatic forms and names” (*Late Style* 23). In repertory theatre, a singular set of conditions enabled Beaumont, Fletcher, and Shakespeare the freedom to try, and on occasion to succeed spectacularly, in stretching the generic boundaries into radically new forms. Within this realm it was possible to have commercial success with less than mainstream genres.

Shakespeare throughout his career was sensitive to theatrical trends, incorporating others’ innovations in ways which were consistent with the demands of a commercial repertory, but also able to do this without compromising his own artistic inclinations. It has been argued, for example, that following the period between 1598 and 1599 when Shakespeare and Jonson both wrote for the Chamberlain’s Men, Shakespeare “increasingly appropriated Jonson’s emphasis on satire in *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Troilus and Cressida* . . . [and that] in doing so, he composed a kind of counter-trilogy to Jonson’s three comical satires, *Every Man Out of His Humour*, *Cynthia’s Revels*, and *Poetaster*” (Bednarz 230). Shakespeare’s adoption of a tragicomic structure for *The Winter’s Tale* can be understood in comparable terms. Doing so enabled Shakespeare to fulfil company expectations with regard to style while also providing an opportunity to work with Beaumont and Fletcher’s model in a way which displayed his own artistic autonomy. In effect, Beaumont and Fletcher’s model was an enabling starting point for Shakespeare’s own experimentation, and a sensitivity to the “multivocality” of early modern theatre allows the late plays of Shakespeare to be understood as variations on the kind of play which Beaumont and Fletcher had introduced to the company.

Shakespeare’s adoption of Beaumont and Fletcher’s tragicomic structure was, however, in no way straightforward. The use of romance conventions within that structure was novel, but also risky. Ben Jonson’s protest in the Induction to *Bartholomew Fair* concerning Shakespeare’s “*Tales, Tempests, and such-like drolleries*” (Induction 97-8) suggests the disdain that any use of Romance conventions could earn. It is, however, impossible to say how representative a view like Jonson’s was and, in any

case, Jonson's dismissal occurs within its own set of generic constraints. The Jonsonian prologue is characterized by claims of artistic merit and disavowals of others' misunderstandings of the theatrical enterprise, and it thus suits Jonson's purposes to isolate Shakespeare's use of Romance tropes, and to exclude other aspects of these plays from his consideration. But in emphasizing only an aspect of Shakespeare's dramaturgy, a reductive reading ensues. The persona assumed by Jonson in this instance may therefore be more indicative of a particular set of performative imperatives rather than representative of a preferred stance. Shift the generic context, and a different orientation towards the same subject will emerge: the laudatory verses penned by Jonson for Shakespeare's First Folio can also function as an eloquent argument for the shaping power of genre.

If the presentation of tired and superannuated tropes was likely to invoke widespread ire, it is unlikely to have been deemed a winning strategy by a commercial playwright like Shakespeare. I argue that the view expressed by Jonson was not representative and that Shakespeare's use of ostensibly tired Romance conventions was perceived differently by audiences. More specifically, I argue that Shakespeare's decision to work with the conventions of Romance achieved two things. It enabled consistency with the new company emphasis on tragicomedy and, just as importantly, allowed the uniqueness of Shakespeare's own contribution to be shown in relief. Alongside this, it enabled a way to refashion the conventions of Romance so that they could be perceived in a new light. If this is to be appreciated, a different strategy to that adopted by Jonson is needed. Rather than isolating the offending tropes from their context and holding them up for scrutiny, something akin to the critical practice of spatial reading is more useful. In this way of reading, consideration of each part of a text is informed by a broader understanding of all its parts. Shakespeare's audiences, apprehending the plays through performance and drawing on their familiarity with other offerings in the repertory, were well-positioned to do this. An understanding of the genres then current would have provided a horizon of expectations within which Shakespeare's innovations were perceived.

The Jacobean audience's familiarity with a historically specific system of genre is thus central to an altered perception of the time-worn generic conventions that Shakespeare deploys in *The Winter's Tale*. Modern audiences, of course, do not share this familiarity. Moments that may have been rich in allusion for those apprehending the play in the

Jacobean period may now appear merely puzzling. In this regard, the most famous stage direction within the Shakespeare canon, and certainly within *The Winter's Tale* – “Exit, pursued by a bear” – is emblematic. It might be presumed that a bear pursuing a character across a stage would be surprising in any context, but surprise would have been only one of the effects generated in this instance because familiarity with a set of conventions made tired through overuse also plays a role in determining audience response. As Helen Cooper observes, “‘Exit, pursued by a bear’ is notorious because to modern theatregoers it seems so random and meaningless . . . [but] [t]he preparation for it lies rather in the coding and resonances that the motif brought with it, still familiar to Jacobean spectators” (3). But Shakespeare does not make use of Romance conventions in the opening acts of *The Winter's Tale* and, consequently, the preparation for the appearance of the bear is omitted. Cooper is right to note the “coding and resonances” that such a convention could command, but it’s also important to observe that Shakespeare’s use of this convention at this moment in *The Winter's Tale* would have represented a violation even for Jacobean audiences. Audiences may have seen bears used in other plays – like the anonymous *Mucedorus*, a play which “staged romance with what was clearly great success” (Cobb 92) – but arguably in these other instances the generic markers of Romance were apparent from the play’s beginning. In the case of *The Winter's Tale*, because the bear’s appearance is apparently unmotivated by the events of the first three acts, the audience is confronted with the necessity of conceiving a recognizable plot structure wherein its appearance *will* make some kind of sense. The capacity of this convention to function as a proleptic marker may be a product of its not conforming to an expected pattern. As a generic signal, the bear is consistent with the tone of the play’s final two acts, but it is clearly not consistent with the preceding acts. For this reason, the bear’s initial appearance may have appeared random and unmotivated to an early modern audience also. For all its familiarity, Shakespeare’s use of this convention in this context would have upset the generic expectations of the Jacobean audience, upsetting any complacency induced by the play’s first three acts. The difference is that this audience, well-versed in the codes of Romance, would have quickly recalibrated its expectations. But far from being seamless, this device would have drawn attention to itself, its power as a cypher assuming more significance in the absence of other more straightforward narratological explanations.

The theme of Romance introduced by the bear's appearance may not make sense within the tragic structure of the first three acts but it can be accommodated by a tragicomic structure. If the bear's status as a device is foregrounded precisely because, at this juncture in the play, its appearance cannot otherwise make sense, this is consistent with the fact that "independently of their theme, narrative texts are cognitively relevant also by their very structure" (Huemer 239). This idea, that the structural elements of a work carry semiotic force, in turn fits with "the assumption that all genres possess historically specific and variable expressive capacities" (Frow, *Genre* 72). Since genres are recognizable combinations of topic and structure (Altman 24), a work's structure is as likely to convey meaningful associations as the topic which the work is ostensibly addressing. In the case of *The Winter's Tale*, a semantic shift is effected when a device familiar from Romance is perceived within a new structural frame. And if the structure can influence how the device is apprehended, the opposite is also true: the influence of this Romance device on the play's tragicomic structure is no less significant. This suggests why, although the tragicomic structure of this play has been well-noted by critics, there is a reluctance to label the play in any straightforward way as a tragicomedy. As John Pitcher notes, "[f]or Shakespeare's making and thinking about the play, the term tragicomedy is indispensable; this is what *The Winter's Tale* is. For the spirit of the play, however, and the influential and emotional goals it urges audiences towards, romance is the only proper word" (24). If a wariness about reducing the play to any one of its elements is a keynote of critical discourse, I argue that this is because the way these two genres intersect in *The Winter's Tale* is especially significant: each is transformed by way of its proximity to the other.

### **Shakespeare's "Keying" of Familiar Romance Tropes**

*Mucedorus* was the most frequently republished play of the period and it was revived for the stage around this time. The lost *Cox of Collumpton* also featured a bear, and Jonson's *Masque of Oberon* featured real polar-bear cubs in the guise of pulling the young Prince Henry's chariot (Pitcher 70). Bears were familiar to audiences, but mainly within the specific generic context of Romance. In the case of *The Winter's Tale*, what is most significant is how meaning is transformed through the act of citation. In taking a familiar convention and using it in an unfamiliar context, Shakespeare renders it once again surprising, and the bear's appearance is emblematic of how "keying" works. In

Frow's terms, the text or convention "has been shifted from a primary to a secondary framework which is patterned on the first but perceived to be quite different from it" (*Genre* 46). Framed by the tragicomic structure which Shakespeare had borrowed from Beaumont and Fletcher, conventions already familiar to the audience were thus able to assume new contours. Beaumont and Fletcher had, despite early experimentation, left the conventions of Romance largely behind. As Suzanne Gossett notes, a play like *Philaster* is "tied to a naturalistic world . . . In *The Faithful Shepherdess* the stabbed heroine is saved by a god; in *Philaster* she is saved by a countryman who is snubbed for his linguistic inadequacy" (58). It is this space of myth vacated by Beaumont and Fletcher that Shakespeare moves into. In *The Winter's Tale*, advice is sought from an oracle, and a statue is found to be flesh and blood. With Hermione's restoration, it is the classical tale of *Alcestis* which is foregrounded. Appreciating that Shakespeare's use of Romance conventions occurs within a tragicomic structure, and that this tragicomic structure was introduced to the King's Men by Beaumont and Fletcher, is a critical move that reduces the distorting effects produced through emphasizing *The Winter's Tale's* place within the Shakespeare canon.

Frow notes that "much of the logic of genre survives these translations from one context to another" (*Genre* 46), and the implications of this are relevant in understanding Shakespeare's use of conventions associated with the genre of prose Romance. Just as riddles lose their point if they are easily solved, the topoi of Romance were by this stage well-worn and unlikely to generate the levels of audience engagement that they once had. The basis for the Jacobean audience's enduring attachment to Romance may therefore have been a nostalgia for what the genre had once reliably delivered. In a sense, Shakespeare is able to capitalize on the audience's desire for nostalgia, but he delivers this by way of novelty, through an unexpected assemblage of familiar topoi. But translation of these conventions into tragicomedy means that, while much of the logic may survive the translation, the conventions no longer mean exactly the same thing. The work's merit therefore resides in part in the artist's capacity to combine the features necessary for nostalgia with those necessary for surprise. "Keying" provided a viable way of working in this instance because Romance conventions were already loaded with associations for the Jacobean audience. There were thus already meanings available which, in a new context, would assume new resonances and be construed differently.

The differences between prose Romance and drama also contribute to the different effects created. The events that figure prominently in the play – shipwrecks, bears, statues – all appear more suited to a diegetic medium like prose where the resources of the reader’s imagination are integral to the effects generated. In contrast, the achievement of verisimilitude in a mimetic medium like drama is dependent on the audience’s visual apprehension. Significantly, at crucial moments in *The Winter’s Tale*, Shakespeare elides mimetic representation altogether, shifting to diegesis in order to recount what has happened. News of the oracle’s pronouncement arrives via an account delivered by two of Leontes’ lords, Cleomenes and Dion, who upon returning from Delphos speak of “the ear-deaf’ning voice o’th’oracle, / Kin to Jove’s thunder” (3.1.9-10). The long deferred reunion between Leontes and his daughter Perdita is not witnessed by the audience but is instead merely “overheard” by way of a conversation between characters whose only function within the drama is to convey this news. As one of these characters, the “Second Gentleman” observes, “This news, which is called true, is so like an old tale that the verity of it is in strong suspicion” (5.2.27-29), and this statement, in a play titled *The Winter’s Tale*, cannot function other than ironically.

Shakespeare’s willingness to elide mimesis here directs attention to those other moments where events are presented by way of it. But these moments, rather than displaying to advantage the visual capacities of the theatre, can paradoxically serve to undermine claims to verisimilitude. Instead, the constraints inherent in visual representation are potentially foregrounded. The main effect is therefore a disruption of the audience’s expectations and the creation of a space where impossibility is the keynote. In this space, not only does the generic logic of Romance survive the translation, it is in fact the main point of the translation. Paradoxically then, while prose Romance may work by way of a suspension of disbelief, Shakespeare’s *Winter’s Tale* also works by engaging that disbelief and using it to effect. A bear, even a real bear, cannot be presented in a dramatic production without being reduced to a cypher. Functioning in a way akin to poetic language which, as distinct from everyday language, draws attention to itself, it has been regrounded into a context where it means something entirely different and where its status as a signifier is underscored. This effect – the effect of “keying” – is central to *The Winter’s Tale*. It is the reason why this play cannot be said to comfortably participate in any one genre.

If one of the effects of “keying” in *The Winter’s Tale* is to impose a kind of separation between the audience and the events presented, then this distancing effect is achieved even by the play’s title. Like George Peele’s precursive *Old Wives Tale* (1592), the title of Shakespeare’s play functions as a generic reference to a fanciful story. But, of course, *The Winter’s Tale* for Jacobean audiences was not a generic “hand-me-down” but a new play. The nostalgic treatment betokened by the title is reinforced through the use of pastoral and romance conventions which achieve, as R.P. Draper notes, “the narrative distancing effected by the archaic manner of ‘an old tale’” (qtd. in Curren-Aquino 33). This foregrounding of mediation is central to the effects generated by the play. As Holger Schott Syme observes, “a deep consciousness of the theatre’s mimetic inadequacy was a staple of [Shakespeare’s] art” (206), and the plot emphasizes “mediation over immediate experience in general, and narrative representation over visual presentation in particular” (209). This of course goes against the logic of the theatre. On a formal level, “keying” reinforces the play’s thematic emphasis on mediation. The appearance of the Chorus in the guise of Time is only the most conspicuous example within a play which continually emphasizes formal devices over the effects they create. If, as Frow notes, “[t]o speak of genre is to speak of what need not be said because it is already so forcefully presupposed” (*Genre* 93), this is a play which nonetheless makes a point of alluding to it.

This is not to say that *The Winter’s Tale*, at least in some ways, does not encourage the audience to fall back on familiar generic expectations. The play opens by overtly announcing, through the courtiers Archidamus and Camillo, the divinely blessed nature of the friendship between the kings of Bohemia and Sicilia. Camillo avows that: “They were trained together in their childhoods, and there rooted betwixt them then such an affection which cannot choose but branch now” (1.1.22-24). It is of course conventional for imaginative texts to present an ordered scene only so that it may be disrupted and, for an audience schooled in the apprehension of such texts, Camillo’s claim will be greeted with suspicion. In the second scene, when Leontes’ irrational jealousy breaks forth with the aside “Too hot, too hot!” (1.2.108), such suspicions are validated. Narrative advancement at other moments also depends on typified responses to conventional cues. As noted, characters throughout the play liken the events they narrate to old tales, but if the familiarity of the reading position invoked by these references is appealing, the surprise in being wrenched from such familiar generic

compacts is only the greater. Complicity thus comes with a price. At key moments in the play, the question arises as to the kind of thing this is, and these reappraisals can produce a salutary effect. The figure of Time which serves to introduce Act 4 also functions – like the bear which has concluded Act 3 – to highlight the artificiality of the narrative conventions in operation. From this point in the drama, it will be difficult for the audience to entirely forget the constructed nature of what is being apprehended. While Colie notes that devices such as “the shipwreck, the bear, the fortuitous love of innocent teenagers, the statue” are conventional within Pastoral (267), they are less easily accepted outside of this generic frame. The incongruous has come into play because, against altered generic backgrounds, these conventions are conspicuous. The sign is now being privileged over the signified, and *The Winter’s Tale’s* incorporation of incongruity suggests that something is amiss.

But if familiar conventions can encourage familiar reading positions, *The Winter’s Tale* provides an unfamiliar context for ostensibly dated tropes, and this encourages the audience’s forbearance of what may have otherwise been signally dismissed. As an example, the Statue scene creates a jarring effect which distances the audience, disrupting their immersion in the play by exposing the generic presuppositions upon which that immersion is built. Verisimilitude is jettisoned and the world of the play is revealed as a fiction. The effect of a Romance convention jutting up against a tragic plot is therefore to undermine the representational power which genres can command by way of the familiar reading positions with which they are associated. Such moments of self-conscious narration suggest the role played by genre in “how realities are constructed and maintained” (Frow, “Reproducibles” 1633). While Fletcher may have been aghast at his audience desiring the reassurance of Pastoral conventions, the balancing of novelty with predictability may have simply represented an astute commercial strategy for Shakespeare. In any case, the appearance of these familiar conventions within a different frame is unsettling and has something of the uncanny about it. Such features are effectively irreconcilable with a tragic structure. But this kind of generic scaffolding is precisely what is necessary in order to enable the audience’s acceptance of Hermione’s revivification, the statue scene itself being an uncanny event which cannot be accommodated by reason. In this regard, the audience must have recourse to the kind of peculiar logic that is the price of entry to a different but very specific genre world. Conventions are therefore used in ways which demand the

audience's conscious cooperation and, in making use of such markers as the statue, the bear and the figure of Time, Shakespeare insists upon his audience's self-conscious acceptance of the effects produced by different genres. This privileging of diegetic conventions over mimesis, although a feature of *The Winter's Tale*, may also have been altered in performance. The text's status as a blueprint for performance is important here because, as noted above, the characteristics inherent in different venues, would have also had a determining influence on reception.

The distinctive aesthetic hallmarks of *The Winter's Tale*, in particular its focus on the irreconcilability of Romance and Tragic conventions, may also serve another more pragmatic function. Stephen Orgel observes that although the play depicts a tyrannical King in the figure of Leontes, King James – who had his own absolutist tendencies – did not appear to take offence. Rather, “he paid his players to perform it repeatedly at court for his entertainment” (Orgel, Introduction 15). It is conceivable that subject matter which may have offended James if presented within the framework of Tragedy, could be tolerated within an altered generic frame. In a sense, Shakespeare's entire play is an exercise in “keying” because the tragic elements which underpin the first three acts and the comic elements which underpin the last two assume different valences by way of their proximity to each other. The matter of genre, and specifically the device of “keying”, may therefore have been central to James's acceptance of the play's potentially confronting depictions of a Royal abuse of power. An overview of Leontes' behaviour in the first three acts underscores this.

In the first three acts of *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes attempts to obscure tyrannical motives behind self-authorizing claims to a king's “just censure” and “true opinion” (2.1.37). He commands Hermione to prison and dismisses his lords' objections by announcing that “Our prerogative / Calls not your counsels, but our natural goodness / Imparts this (2.1.163-65). This kind of behaviour is consistent with that displayed by a tragic hero like Marlowe's Tamburlaine. But of course, the passage of time and the course of events which the play depicts enable Leontes to think better of the errors he has committed, and this raises “the question of genre and the concept of time that determines in no small measure the narrative and affective contours of each generic type” (Curren-Acquino 1). In other words, the kind of emotional satisfaction that is specific to tragicomedy is dependent in this instance on there being sufficient narrative time to enable Leontes to regret his earlier behaviour and to make amends for it. More

like Lear than Tamburlaine, Leontes displays opposing incarnations because he is a figure who is both tyrannical and repentant. But unlike Lear, who finds that the world of Pastoral cannot accommodate him, Leontes gains entry to a genre world where he is granted time and space. He is thus able to properly repent and this enables him further rewards. The diegetically-centred scene which opens Act 4, after the figure of Time has announced the passing of sixteen years, is itself long and functions to move the audience's focus away from the events of the first three acts. Expectations are inevitably shifted by the Pastoral mode that ensues. The revival of Hermione may require spectators to suspend their disbelief, but after these generic preparations the event itself does not challenge the aesthetic contours of the play. As unlikely as it is, it is nonetheless made possible by the play's tragicomic structure. By way of contrast, there is the negative example offered by the rewriting of the Cordelia role in Nahum Tate's version of *King Lear*. Although Cordelia's survival at the end of that play is ostensibly more realistic than Hermione's, it is an occurrence which lacks aesthetic motivation. Thus, although fashionable in the Restoration period and beyond with audiences prepared to tolerate generic inconsistency for the pleasures of wish fulfilment and sentimentality, Tate's version of the play retains no artistic credibility. It is here that the work done by genre is important, because while "[r]omance acknowledges that tragedy is right: there is no escape from destiny and biology; . . . [humans also have a] need to believe in the truly impossible (life after death)" (Pitcher 21). Different genres allow the impossible to find various forms of expression but admission to these specific realms of possibility must be earned. Nahum Tate's version of *Lear* is an anomaly because it provided an ending which could not be accommodated by the genre of tragedy.

If Hermione's revival indicates that a very specific conception of time and space – one that is consistent with the play's tragicomic structure – is necessary, this suggests what Mikhail Bakhtin, in attempting to convey "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (84), famously terms the *chronotope*. Because time-space relationships are worked out differently in different genres, Bakhtin asserts that "it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions, for in literature the primary category of the chronotope is time" (85). In this sense, the dimensions of time in *The Winter's Tale* have what Bakhtin might term "an elementary biological or maturational duration" (90). As in the tradition of prose Romance, the treatment of time in Shakespeare's play is determined by the needs

of the plot: it is necessary, as the Chorus puts it at the beginning of Act 4, to “slide / O’er sixteen years, and leave the growth untried / Of that wide gap” (4.1.5-7), in order to allow Perdita sufficient time to grow into marriageable age. But thematically, this temporal elision serves another function because, as John Pitcher notes, Shakespeare builds on Euripides’ discovery that “genres of tragedy and romance were not alternatives . . . rather they were successive stages in human feeling” (12). In structural terms, tragicomedy is able to make provision for these different stages and in doing so enables a spectrum of responses.

Jacobean audiences were familiar with the genre of tragedy, but what does a tragedy look like when placed next to a comedy, and what in turn does the comedy become? The role played by “keying” is vital to understanding how those audiences made sense of the play’s unusual structure, wherein the tragedy that plays out in a compressed form in Acts 1 to 3 is made to sit alongside the comedy of Acts 4 and 5. It is the relations here, rather than the parts themselves, that are crucial in determining the play’s dramatic effects. As Frow notes more generally, reality is not “singular and external to the forms through which [it is] apprehend[ed]”, and so genre in effect acts as a screen which colours perception (“Reproducibles” 1633). In *The Winter’s Tale*, this screen is at times made visible, and the means by which effects are created are at times privileged over the effects themselves. This technique can be somewhat disorienting for those apprehending the play. Russ McDonald notes that a capacity to generate opposing viewpoints is characteristic of the late plays in general. Commenting on the disparate views held by two “distinguished critics”, McDonald observes that “[o]ne guide to understanding the disagreement is the name of the dramatic mode represented by most of these plays: tragicomedy. Each critic may be said to emphasize one half of the term” (Arts 189). This is possible because, by way of “keying”, the play’s tragic and comic elements can be present simultaneously. “Keying” is a complex operation because, as Frow notes “[s]hifting texts to another generic context . . . suspends the primary generic *force* of the text, but not its generic *structure*” (*Genre* 46, italics in original). Thus, a convention’s original context can never be completely erased by the manoeuvre of “keying”, but new possibilities can be opened up.

While “keying” can be posited as an explanation for why a play about a tyrannical king was successful in the Jacobean court, the device can also be understood as serving another even more pragmatic function. That is, “keying” may also suggest how

Shakespeare was able to make use of his dramatic experience – the years he spent writing certain kinds of play – in order to create new effects and remain consistent with an altered company direction. Zachary Lesser and Peter Stallybrass have posited that “[s]ometime around 1607, he [Shakespeare] decided to become an apprentice again in the popular theatre, learning his trade from the ground up as a writer of tragicomedy, with George Wilkins and John Fletcher as his masters in the new trade” (“First Literary Hamlet” 417). The basic assertion – that Shakespeare in this period was working with a genre model introduced into the company by his younger peers – is certainly correct. But of course, with a wealth of knowledge about the theatre to draw upon, Shakespeare would have made an unusual apprentice. Instead, expertise as a playwright enabled Shakespeare to work with the latest innovations in a creative and imaginative way, and this could well account for how the “late” plays bear similarities to the work of Beaumont and Fletcher while at the same time appearing individuated and unique. The reality is that while Shakespeare may have been learning new approaches to playwriting, he was aligning these new approaches with the substantial amount that he already knew. Lacking experience in tragicomedy, but knowing how to write comedies and tragedies, the experienced playwright splices these two genres together by way of Romance and Pastoral inflections, and *The Winter’s Tale* thus represents a new version of tragicomedy. “Keying” represents a way for Shakespeare to be consistent with a new company direction without entirely abandoning the kinds of play which his career had prepared him to write.

In addition to using the resources of genre in order to unsettle audience expectations, Shakespeare takes advantage of a particular moment in the history of the Romance form. As Heather Dubrow notes in another context, “the cultural coding of form varies from period to period and within a given era or a given text. The decision to write a sonnet . . . is typically an advertisement of one’s virtuosity and genealogy in the early modern period and of a determined . . . interest in form in our own day” (*The Challenges of Orpheus* 3-4). Shakespeare’s aesthetic choices within plays like *The Winter’s Tale* and *The Tempest* can be understood in an analogous way because, at this historical moment, the conventions of the Romance genre were capable of generating different responses. One of these responses is exemplified in Ben Jonson’s prologue, but significantly, Jonson does not accuse Shakespeare of writing a Romance. The objection is rather to the use of Romance conventions. Indeed, if Shakespeare had been writing Romances, his use of

these conventions would have been expected and not especially noteworthy. The usage is therefore only conspicuous because the conventions have been taken from their original context and “keyed” within a tragicomic structure. If writing in an unfashionable style is a way of standing out from your contemporaries, Romance conventions – if deployed within a new context – could conceivably achieve this end. Indeed, this manoeuvre comfortably sits under the banner of “keying”. More specifically, since texts, and the genres in which they participate, are “constantly ‘keyed’ as they are cited in other contexts, they are thus constantly shifted out of the situation to which they typically respond” (Frow, *Genre* 46). In this way, conventions borrowed from a long tradition of prose Romance could, against the new tragicomic frame popularised by Beaumont and Fletcher, function quite differently as markers of innovation. “Keying” in fact depends on the transplanted genre retaining some of its original integrity in order for the juxtapositions it invites to be effective and, in this instance, the residual popularity of Romance may have been significant. Unlike Jonson, who was firmly against the genres of popular taste being imported into drama, theatre audiences of the time may have been inclined to privilege the possibility of new effects being generated from an old but still fondly conceived genre like Romance.

Acceptance of the idea that the genres or cycles associated with given repertoires were the product of more than writerly preferences can enable further qualifications. While it is routine for writers to become associated with particular genres, the power conveyed by the epithet “Shakespearean” can encourage critics to fashion narratives linking Shakespeare with the genre’s moment of origin. This kind of move inevitably understates the complexity of the processes of genre formation and is also inconsistent with the accepted view of Shakespeare’s creative strengths for, as Martin Wiggins notes more generally: “[Shakespeare] was a great completer, maximizing the potential of other men’s innovations” (132). Edward Burns offers a comparable summation, noting that “in relation to tragedy, tragicomedy and comedy [Shakespeare seems] to have taken accepted models and proceeded imaginatively from them, rather than seeking to replace or subvert them” (152). Similarly, while biographical information about a given writer should not be automatically exempted from consideration – as Kermode notes, “the work of a writer changes under pressures that can be regarded as partly private as well as responsive to more public, cultural pressures” (127) – the Shakespeare canon has invited a preponderance of such speculation. This is a largely misguided enterprise

given that there is insufficient biographical detail to support a personal development narrative. Foregrounding the role played by genre within the repertory can act as a corrective to this, making explicit the assumptions inherent in the category “late plays” or “romances”. Long associated with a biography of the author as imagined by nineteenth century critics – most notably Dowden – this group remains problematic and contested.

Although there are no overt difficulties in placing Shakespeare’s plays from this period alongside the other newly emerging tragicomedies of the King’s Men, doing so involves an implicit demotion of the value routinely ascribed Shakespeare’s works. Unlike Renaissance tragedy, comedy or history – where the Shakespearean form is considered emblematic of the genres themselves – the genre of tragicomedy is most strongly associated with other playwrights. It was Beaumont and Fletcher who were more prolific in this form, and it was their version of tragicomedy that “became canonical in the later Jacobean and Caroline theatre” (Bliss 1). Accordingly, the designations “Romance” or “late” fulfil a pragmatic purpose for critics wanting to convey a sense of Shakespeare’s singularity, while the designation “tragicomedy” does not. Instead, it places Shakespeare squarely among his contemporaries. But Shakespeare’s version of the form does not have to be read in terms that compromise aesthetic achievement. Shakespeare’s use of such tired conventions can also be read as an almost brazen declaration to depart from the kind of works wherein such conventions were typically read without irony. While Shakespeare may not deploy the conventions with the comic intent of Beaumont in *Knight*, he does nonetheless make use of his audience’s familiarity with a set of conventions that have become tired through overuse. If Shakespeare’s and Beaumont’s plays are ‘romances’, they are not “romances” in the way that a Jacobean audience would have perceived. Failing to acknowledge how these plays differed from their predecessors is an omission that collapses the distance between what had become a stale tradition, and an innovative take on that tradition. These are the kinds of moves that make sense in a repertory environment where both familiarity and novelty are rewarded but not in equal measure. The brilliance of the move in this instance is that Shakespeare is effectively using the familiar as a basis upon which to achieve the novel. He does not denounce the Romance genre’s power, as Beaumont does by poking fun at its excesses, but harnesses it instead to a new end of

his own devising. Rather than one more insipid production, he effectively gives a tired genre new power by placing it in a new context entirely.

G. K. Hunter observes that “Fletcherian tragicomedy is probably the last substantial generic innovation to take possession of the Elizabethan stage” (*English Drama* 523). To the extent that this innovation originated in Shakespeare’s company, Shakespeare himself could hardly have ignored it, but he was by this stage in his career far beyond merely aping the styles of his contemporaries. The subgenre he created would have been easily subsumed under the company mantle and is unlikely to have struck contemporaries as being in any way definitive. But with time, it would come to be coded and weighted differently. The repertory moment in which it emerged, and the significance of the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher within the King’s Men, would largely be forgotten. According to the needs of posterity, Shakespeare’s response to the plays of his peers would be inserted within a narrative unforeseeable at the time. Ultimately, the Shakespearean subgenre would eclipse the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher that gave rise to it.

## Chapter Four – The Stationers

The early modern stationers involved in the publication of the first playbooks were involved in a risky enterprise. The market for playbooks was small, and a play on the page might very well have been considered a poor facsimile of the richness that was inherent in the experience of theatre attendance. For early modern stationers working in the realm of playbooks, this presented a challenge. If staged enactments had to be somehow reconfigured for a new medium, the key sites for this reconfiguration were the title-pages and prefaces of playbooks, what Gerard Genette would term paratexts. These paratexts were immensely significant and rich in detail. Claire M. L. Bourne's research has established that the title-pages of certain plays by Beaumont and Fletcher – *The Maid's Tragedy*, *Philaster*, *A King and No King* – featured bespoke woodcuts which are "indicative of a publishing strategy aimed at adapting into print a new kind of suspenseful, plot-driven drama" (276). The visual paradoxes employed on these title-pages can therefore be read as representations of the formal arrangements which characterized these plays. In going to these lengths, stationers were attempting to offer readers something in lieu of the thrill of theatrical performance – an experience that was different but not necessarily inferior. Title-pages were essentially a means by which stationers could market playbooks and consequently details such as playing company, author, and genre – and indeed publisher and bookseller, as well as bespoke illustrations – were enlisted to attain this end. In this account, I privilege genre for the particular usefulness which it carried for stationers. Above any other tool in the stationer's arsenal, genre provided a way of making interventions which could negotiate the space between two different uses of the text. I argue that stationers relied on the resources of genre to summon potential readerships in an industry where playbooks constituted only a marginal presence.

The world of the theatre was a social one, and this was part of the appeal for those who attended. The appeal of playbooks, however, was not so straightforward. In this chapter, I consider the publication in quarto of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, and examine the significance of genre for the playbook's publishers Richard Bonian and Henry Walley. I argue that, rather than using genre as a means by which to locate the essence of the text, these stationers used the resources of genre to achieve more pragmatic interests. Of these, three are especially prominent. First, *Troilus and Cressida* had been written for performance in the public theatres but publication in quarto

demanded that it be reconfigured for a different medium. Second, in a nascent capitalist society, those involved in the marketing of goods were beginning to understand people as consumers defined by distinct tastes. Third, people themselves were increasingly aware that in purchasing a commodity they were on some level joining a group whose members shared their tastes. But for the purchasers of playbooks, this new self-consciousness was complicated by the fact that, unlike theatre audiences, readers could not see each other face-to-face. The publishers attempted to compensate readers for this, and conceived of genre as a means by which purchasers could be positioned to feel a kind of solidarity. Bonian and Walley attempted to alter perceptions of the text by way of the paratext, and this too represents a departure from the practice of some earlier stationers. By way of an example, I consider the publisher Richard Jones and his attempts to alter perceptions of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great*. Jones, like Bonian and Walley, wished to take advantage of a particular set of genre expectations in the marketing of his quarto. Unlike Bonian and Walley, however, Jones was unable to fully recognize the power residing in the genre terms he used. Mistakenly believing that genre resided wholly in the text, Jones moved beyond the paratext in order to make cuts to the play itself.

### **Imagining Community**

In Shakespeare's *Henry V*, on the eve of the Battle of Agincourt, the soldiers assembled before King Henry are invited to imagine their future selves. The occasion is "the feast of Crispian" and they envisage themselves as old men recollecting, and imaginatively reconstructing, their part in the battle that is about to take place. Shakespeare's rhetorical trick is to have Henry inhabit the consciousness of one such veteran. As the King tells it:

Old men forget; yet all should be forgot  
But he'll remember, with advantages,  
What feats he did that day. Then shall our names,  
Familiar in his mouth as household words,  
Harry the King, Bedford and Exeter,  
Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester,  
Be in their flowing cups freshly remembered (4.3.49-55).

In Henry's proleptic vision, the imagined soldier is no longer on the campaign with his fellows. The actual group he belonged to has dissipated, but he is able to construe his former companions by way of imagination and memory, and his involvement in the victory at Agincourt is now an annual remembrance. He is therefore not bereft of a sense of community. Henry, in his speech, has planted the seeds for a different form of engagement that transcends the need for physical presence. The feelings of solidarity which Henry suggests are the true reward for fighting at Agincourt will endure, and the otherwise forfeited sense of commonality experienced on the battlefield will be retained, but only by way of a form of ritualized participation coinciding with St Crispin's Day on the calendar.

This act of rhetorical conjuration, in addition to the function it fulfils within *Henry V*, suggests in epitome something which is central to the theatrical enterprise: figures are summoned through dramatic representations, and past moments can be regained by way of facsimile. In the process, the theatrical performance is imbued with its own power, and it was this power which the early modern theatre traded in. Renaissance drama was an art-form intended for performance, an art-form that provided representations that were beyond the playgoer's everyday experience. The theatre's appeal may in part have resided in the lavish costuming of the performers, in the decoration which adorned the stage, and in the props which could be a feature of performances. The logical consequence was that "[t]he theatre, in short, could contain the world" (Crawforth et al, 12). It is perhaps this idea of the theatre that gave rise to the belief that the Latin tag, *totus mundus agit historionem* – the sentiment that was given expression and amplified by Jacques in his "All the World's a Stage" speech in *As You Like It* (2.7.140) – was the motto of the Globe. It remains an appealing notion despite the fact that, as Tiffany Stern has pointed out, "[t]here are . . . no Elizabethan references to the Globe's Latin motto at all, though the comparison between world and stage was a commonplace" ("*Totus Mundus*" 125). Nevertheless, play attendance also meant opportunities for interaction with other playgoers, and this carried the possibility that those from different social groups would establish affinities.

While going to the theatre meant face-to-face encounters with other theatre-goers, this was not the case in the world of print. In this world, before readerships existed, they had to be imagined. Benedict Anderson's theorizing of the early print industry and his concept of "imagined communities" is helpful in understanding how stationers, like

Shakespeare's *Henry*, sought to provide readers with compensation for a lost sense of commonality. Anderson's concept stems from an undeniable reality; as he explains it: "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6). Effectively, this means that the nation itself is an "imagined political community" (6) and implicit within Anderson's account of the early print industry is the idea that printers were in the business of constructing collective identity and, in this way, contributing to the processes whereby national consciousness was formed. As noble as this may sound, this was not entirely a moral undertaking on the part of printers. Rather, it was that book publishing was "[o]ne of the earlier forms of capitalist enterprise . . . [and] felt all of capitalism's restless search for markets (38). Accordingly, once the market of Latin readers – "a wide but thin stratum" – was saturated, printers turned their attention to one much larger by "peddling cheap editions in the vernaculars" (38). Regardless of the size of the market, the motivation was essentially the same. The stationers of early modern playbooks, in their drive to find markets for a less than mainstream form of publishing, can be understood by way of Anderson's influential theory. The playbook industry was small and it was a supply-driven business. The stationer's task was effectively not just to locate but more importantly to create communities of readers and this meant that it was unlike the task of attracting audiences to the public playhouses in the Liberties. The experience for the purchaser was unique too. In comparison to paying the entrance fee at a public playhouse, purchasing a playbook was an entirely different transaction. This kind of purchase was, I argue, an invitation to participate in an imagined community. And, for the stationers, title-pages presented an opportunity to reach out and bring new kinds of readerships into existence.

### **Revising the Status of Stationers**

Perhaps because of the significance which title-pages hold for scholars of early modern drama, the practices of stationers have been subject to much scrutiny. In the past, much of this scrutiny was negative. The interventions made by stationers in the course of printing early modern playbooks and folios were once considered a consequence of unscrupulous business practices indulged in by a group of stakeholders who had no interest in the aesthetic merit of the works themselves. With the passing of New

Bibliography into critical history, a different account of the contribution made by these stationers to the history of early modern drama has been presented. The economic motivations of such figures are now more routinely considered a generative rather than damaging force within the world of early modern playbooks. But while it is no longer routine for stationers' commercial interests to be invoked negatively, when it comes to the subject of genre there appears some residual bias. That is, the vested interests of stationers can still be cited as a way of qualifying the validity of genre designations which, from the perspective of modern scholarship, appear dubious. As a consequence, what constituted grounds under the New Bibliographers for outright dismissal is sometimes transformed under New Textualism into grounds for excuse. This is not to imply that there have been no advances in understanding. The position adopted by Zachary Lesser, who considers the genre designations conceived by stationers to be representative of a particular orientation towards an imagined audience, is an enlightened one. But, even in such instances, the designation itself remains comprehensible only within the specific version of events elucidated by the critic. Thus, because it has not been accommodated to any broader understanding of the processes by which genres are formed, outside of this specific critical account – and this is true regardless of how convincing that account may be – the designation is likely to appear anomalous.

While scholars routinely make use of a pragmatic discourse in order to explain the inclusion of some of the details appearing on title-pages – it is accepted, for example, that references to acting companies and authors were aimed at a commercial end – a persistent critical tendency to locate genre primarily in textual elements means that its capacity to function in more pragmatic terms is often deemed illegitimate. This is less the fault of any individual critic and more the symptom of a pervasive lack of understanding with regard to the functioning of genre. The concept of genre has traditionally been thought to reside in the text itself and, while this may appear an intuitive way of understanding, it carries shortcomings. The view expressed by Altman, who observes that genre is a product of “the particular purposes and practices of those who actually use [it]” (98), is helpful as a corrective. Working within the context of film criticism, Altman provides a useful account of the way genre is routinely conceptualized, and posits that “given the range of variables used to define individual genres”, the critical tendency to adopt “an exclusionary discourse” is surprising (85). That is,

considering that genre can be “locate[d] in the mind or models of generic authors” or, “in the texts that are produced through dependence on generic models” or in, “reader or viewer expectation” or “as a critical construct”, it is somewhat limiting to assume that it resides in only one of these places (84-5). Locating genre wholly within the text means that the designations deployed by stationers are necessarily conceived as retrospective interventions, as responses to a text whose genre was determined in the act of composition. Stationers, therefore, are unable to be considered as agents making constructive contributions to a process of genre formation that is underway. This critical orientation also ignores the significance of the audience. Given that “the very notion of genre depends on the existence of audience activity” (Altman 83-4), the fact that stationers were addressing an audience with tastes specific to their time and environment needs consideration.

It is true that stationers were likely to privilege their own commercial interests and that this necessarily informed the nature of the designations that were ascribed to texts. But in attempting to protect their own interests, they were acting no differently to any other stakeholder. In any case, the pragmatic considerations which informed the business practices of stationers have recently received scholarly attention, and the evidence suggests that commercial concerns did not obviate the possibility of stationers making “significant interventions in the contemporary cultural and political landscape” (Melnikoff, “Republican *Hamlet*” 97). Adam G. Hooks has noted that “[t]he publisher of *Pericles*, Henry Gosson, specialized in timely, ephemeral pamphlets that capitalized on popular or notorious events, and the immediate notoriety of *Pericles* certainly fit his business model” (“Book Trade” 139). Zachary Lesser observes that the stationer Thomas Archer attained Webster’s *The White Devil* “for the same reason he chose his other plays”, because it was “about a woman and the ‘woman question’” (*Drama* 116). Tara L. Lyons argues persuasively that the stationer Thomas Pavier was moved to acquire *A Yorkshire Tragedy* because its subject was of topical interest and consequently able to be marketed “alongside the ballad or the other sensational news books in his shop” (“Serials” 197). Such manoeuvres can easily be accommodated to Altman’s theory, based on observations of Hollywood studio practices, whereby texts “already associated with entirely different genres . . . are brought together by virtue of a new identification with some common feature” (108). Understanding the activities of these stationers as genre interventions means that it is possible to extend the work of the above critics.

More specifically, these instances have not been situated within a larger process of genre contestation whereby various stakeholders vie to control the terms through which a text is understood. All of these stationers aim to reconfigure texts which are already known by identifying a feature that fits with their own interests. Gosson privileges the contemporary relevance of *Pericles* over the significance of its historical setting; Archer reads *The White Devil* as a play about the “woman question”; and Pavier is interested in *A Yorkshire Tragedy* primarily on the grounds of its sensationalism, a feature which will recommend it to those browsing the ballads in his shop. These interventions indicate how stationers were sensitive to the way that genre could further their interests, regardless of whether these interests were predominantly commercial or ideological in nature. As such, these are primarily genre interventions.

Pavier’s placement of *A Yorkshire Tragedy* alongside the ballad form is a particularly emblematic example. Rather than simply highlighting the disjunction between modern and early modern conceptions of texts, Pavier’s intervention points to the discursive investment which is intrinsic to any genre system. As Altman puts it, “[g]enres must be understood . . . as language . . . addressed by one party to another, usually for a specific, identifiable purpose” (121). Consistent with this, “variations in generic affiliation” will reflect the range of discursive positions available (122). Pavier, keen to secure the interest of a particular type of purchaser frequenting his shop, positions *A Yorkshire Tragedy* amongst other works in his catalogue and so engages in a form of what might be termed “generic posturing” (Altman 78). A contrived correspondence between a playbook and a matter of some social significance results in a genre alignment that later, when deprived of its originating context, will appear idiosyncratic. Indeed, the reading positions useful to early moderns can appear almost unintelligible now; a genre like the “Nocturnal”, which is cited in the Induction to John Marston’s *What You Will* (1601), is an example of how the expectations generated by genres are dependent on specific systems. The converse, however, is also true; while *A Yorkshire Tragedy* can now be considered an example of domestic tragedy, this designation is unlikely to have been useful to Pavier or his purchasers. Modern designations can hardly be expected to represent reading positions current within the early modern period, and this underscores the importance of considering playbooks within the context informing their creation and reception. In this regard, Pavier’s intervention is representative of the approach adopted by early modern stationers towards genre. The interventions made

by stationers can be understood as participating in a broader process of generic contestation whereby various stakeholders assert different reading positions.

The nascent form of the early modern playbook industry therefore provides an opportunity to reassess the activities of stationers as contributions to the process by which texts become aligned with particular genres. It also enables the contested nature of this process, usually elided in those accounts which focus on more established relationships between texts and genres, to be revealed. Given the frenetic production rate of the early modern theatre industry, the fact that a single text could be assigned a number of designations provides an indication of the different reading positions in circulation. Over time, of course, many of these designations lose currency. Because the matter of genre designation might only be settled retrospectively (and sometimes not at all), the flux that surrounds the initial period of reception allows publishers a certain degree of freedom. It is possible in this moment to assign a genre in accordance with the interests of an already identified readership; in other words, to fit the text to an audience. A play may be designated a “history” because, for a segment of the print market, this label carries appealing connotations of learnedness. Similarly, a stationer may market a playbook so that it appears consonant with other works that have already demonstrated appeal for particular readerships.

### **The Significance of Genre for Stationers**

Consistent with these assertions, I argue that early modern stationers conceived of genre as a means by which the desires of various niche markets – for example, the citizens or Inns of Court students that comprised identifiably different social strata (Straznicky, *Book* 15) – could be targeted. The genre designations attached to Christopher Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* by the printer Richard Jones provide an example. The two parts are entered originally in the Stationers’ Register on 14 August 1590 as “*The twooe commicall discourses of TOMBERLEIN the Cithian shepparde*” (Arber, 2.558). But as Tara Lyons observes, “[w]hen Jones printed *1 & 2 Tamburlaine* in 1590, he did not market the plays as ‘commicall discourse’ but instead highlighted other generic features” (“Jones” 151). Consequently, the plays were called “Tragical Discourses” on the title-page and, in the printer’s own preface, the two parts were referred to collectively as an “honorable & stately . . . history”. Given that Jones addresses his preface to an audience of “Gentleman Readers”, the changes appear consistent with an

attempt to refashion Marlowe's theatrical "blockbuster" into reading material worthy of serious attention.

Situating the activities of stationers like Jones within a broader context of generic contestation, I provide an alternative explanation for those designations which depart from modern representations and which are often deemed idiosyncratic as a result. In departing from teleologically informed conceptions of texts and their genres, this approach reveals the validity of Thomas Beebee's claim that "generic differences are grounded in the 'use-value' of a discourse rather than in its content, formal features, or its rule of production" (7). Stationers, through various paratextual strategies, privileged semantic or formal features and effected the text's alignment with the tastes of a sought-after audience in print. As such, the activities of stationers are emblematic of the process, identified by Altman through the term "regenrification", whereby genres are modified by users in response to the demands of new mediums. Resituating the strategies of stationers within a process intrinsic to the formation of all genres means that, rather than being viewed as anomalous, such designations can be understood as the expressions of a pragmatic, discursive investment that is period-specific.

The title-pages of playbooks were, of course, the main sites where appeals to the assumed ideological investments of purchasers could be made. When considered in its guise as promotion, the title-page "closely resembles the playbill" (Stern, "Playbills" 78), that form of advertising which adorned posts and provided information about the various repertory company offerings on a given day. This is because, as Stern notes, "[a]dvertisements for books consisted of title-pages separately printed and hung on the posts of the city" ("Playbills" 78). This would suggest that plays, whether in performance or print, were conceived as comparable entities able to be marketed in the same way. But the playhouses, in addition to their posting of playbills, had developed a system of visual imagery – most emblematically represented in the flags that flew above the various theatres – to enable the marketing of performances to "the literate and illiterate alike" (Stern, *Shakespeare* 16). Playbooks, on the other hand, required a high level of literacy and in the world of print publication the egalitarian enticements of the theatre were by necessity replaced by an appeal more narrow and class-based. Thus, while title-page advertisements participated in the same public space as playbills, democratic display did not translate into democratic appeal. Notwithstanding the fact

that title-page advertisements shared the same public space as playbills, the marketing of playbooks proceeded by way of different strategies.

### **The Case of *Troilus and Cressida***

Although the discursive investment of stationers is often disguised, there are other instances where it is readily apparent and the case of *Troilus and Cressida* represents one of these. Like half of the thirty six plays that appeared in the First Folio of 1623, *Troilus and Cressida* had earlier appeared in playbook form. But the playbook that appeared in 1609, six years after the play was registered with the stationer's company and approximately eight years after its composition, is of interest not only because it offers a distinct version of the play. The events that attended the printing of *Troilus and Cressida* in quarto were in themselves singular. As Zachary Lesser puts it, "at some point during the press run of the first edition . . . , the publishers Richard Bonian and Henry Walley changed their minds about the play" (1). But the decision they made, to recompose the title-page and insert a preface, could not have been taken lightly. Early modern printing involved arranging moveable metal type in a hand press and, once printing was underway, "unlocking the chase [a frame with crossbars] and adjusting or replacing type was a tricky business" (Maguire 444). As a consequence of the publishers instructing their printer to do this, however, the quarto exists in two states. In the first, a title-page directs the reader's attention to the play's theatrical incarnation, claiming that the edition is "As it was acted by the Kings Majesties servants at the Globe". In the revised second state all mention of this theatrical incarnation is omitted, while a newly added preface, emphasizing the play's comic and satirical elements, declares that the play was "never staled with the Stage, never clapper-clawed with the palms of the vulgar" (Bevington, *Troilus* 120). The seriousness with which the publishers treated the play's peripheral features is foregrounded by the fact that changes to the actual text of *Troilus and Cressida* did not motivate the stop-press moment. More specifically, considering that a privileging of the play's satirical aspects is the main function of the inserted preface, it is clear that the publishers had an expectation that genre would prove valuable in the marketing of the play.

I argue that the claims made in this famous preface should not only be read as a publisher's instinctive response to a contemporaneous vogue for satirical comedy, but should be more profoundly understood as epitomizing the volatility that characterized

genre in the early modern period. As a reconfiguration of *Troilus and Cressida*, the intervention by Bonian and Walley can be examined within a broader arena of generic contestation whereby various stakeholders assert control over the terms through which a text is understood. If the process of alignment between texts and genres takes time, this also provides opportunities; for Bonian and Walley, it appears the key question was not what the play was but what they wanted it to be. Characterizing the play as a “Commedie”, a designation contradicting the title-page designations of “Historie” and “Famous Historie”, they make a clear bid to shape the reader’s perception (indeed, the words “commicall” and “commedie[s]” are repeated seven times throughout the preface, the word “witte” or “witty” six times). It is worthwhile considering why Bonian and Walley eschew the grander sounding designation “Historie” for one placed lower in the received hierarchy of genres. In Renaissance literary culture, a culture in which “a high style befits its high subject – epic or tragic; a low style a low subject, comedy or some lyric forms” (Colie 7), there were implications for doing so.

In this culture, where a hierarchical doctrine held sway, the import of different genres extended beyond the aesthetic realm into the social. Bonian and Walley appear acutely conscious of this. Anticipating the likely social response to their designation, they claim, “And were but the vain names of comedies changed for the titles of commodities, or of plays for pleas; you should see all those grand censors, that now style them such vanities, flock to them for the main grace of their gravities” (Bevington, *Troilus* 120). This reads like a kind of pre-emptive defence against the naysayers who would otherwise dismiss the play. So unashamedly is the appeal here intended for a new mercantile class, comfortable with a commodified form of literature and seeking the validation of market culture, that the publishers may as well be invoking the marketer’s favourite slogan “Avoid disappointment. Buy now”. Altman has noted that “[t]he late Renaissance rise of generic consciousness was specifically predicated on a revival of the genres of classical Greece and Rome: comedy, tragedy, satire, ode and epic” (49). For Bonian and Walley, then, to invoke the term “history” in the context of playbooks may have been altogether too suggestive of a genre associated mainly with vernacular theatre. The term “comedy” on the other hand, could be relied upon for its classical associations. But concomitant with the esteem awarded the classical, in the case of comedy there was a measure of denigration. Ironically, Bonian and Walley assert the value of the play by daringly placing it within a genre whose works are also deemed

frivolous and dismissed as “vanities” by the falsely sophisticated, those they term “grand censors”. In this, as elsewhere in the preface, the publishers flatter their purchaser’s ability to discern, to recognize that the virtues of this comedy should not be compromised by received notions. Thus, their idealized purchaser is sufficiently clear-sighted to recognize the playbook’s status as commodity, but also insightful enough to glean its aesthetic value. By characterizing the playbook as both a “comedy” and “commodity” – both pejorative terms within an early modern context – the publishers paradoxically assert its value for the self-consciously elite.

Bonian and Walley also appear to have capitalized on an ambiguity inherent within the designation “comedy”. As if in response to the inchoate market forces surrounding them, the stationers oscillate between placing *Troilus* within the wave of satirical comedy inaugurated by Jonson’s *Every Man Out of His Humour*, and situating it more firmly within a tradition of comedy bearing antecedents in Plautus and Terence. This hesitation, however, is perhaps understandable given the stationers’ desire to set their play apart from the offerings of the public stage. If the phrase “new genre” is popularly perceived to be something of an oxymoron (Altman 80), it is because “[g]enres must be defined recursively: genres are made out of other genres” (Beebee 264). Thus, if *Troilus and Cressida* is to be perceived as a comical satire, but one not tainted by associations with the vernacular theatre, the matter of origin becomes a problem. The play must somehow be placed in a lineage and this calls for some sleight of hand. Invoking Plautus and Terence, playwrights whose works in the Renaissance would have been familiar through print – or possibly through performances conducted away from the large public amphitheatres by the boys’ companies of St Paul’s and Blackfriars’ – the publishers defer the problem of origin onto a remote classical past. This masterful strategy enables them to ostensibly detach their play from the vernacular theatre while simultaneously drawing on the trend for comical satire within it, a trend to which they make no explicit reference. Removing their play from a familiar contemporary context also allows the publishers the freedom to dictate the terms through which it is understood and to redefine as they desire.

Of course, a reading position only has power if it is shared and the publishers’ awareness of this is implicit in the effort they make to ensure that their playbook finds the right audience. Marta Straznicky notes the propensity of the book trade to rely “more heavily on niche marketing” (*Book* 9) and Lesser similarly argues that “the

different economies of the printing house and the theatre would have made it far easier in print to target specific social groups, tailor one's choice of plays to suit their interests, and market those plays so as to get their attention" (79). It was in the marketing of plays that the use-values of various genres – as reimagined in print – could be matched more accurately to the desires of different audiences. It is this concept of use-value that is helpful in understanding the approach adopted by Bonian and Walley towards the publication of *Troilus and Cressida*. Indeed, without recourse to this concept, the existence of two different title-pages featuring different genre designations for the same play appears idiosyncratically motivated rather than meaningfully intended. What a text means is dependent on the audience apprehending it, and it is the concept of genre that allows for an alignment of text and audience to occur.

### ***Troilus and Cressida* and a new world of commodity fetishism**

It has been observed that the early modern period inaugurated "a gradual replacement of things by signs, of reality by representation" (Hawkes, *Idols* 30), and the power ascribed to commodities can be understood as emblematic of this process. The dramatic fulcrum of Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour*, the St Paul's Walk sequence, provides an object lesson in the vanities that typify those transfixed by new-found possibilities of social mobility. As the characters stage a representation of the famous cathedral aisle, a social hub where all manner of classes and occupations gathered to see and be seen, the power exercised by various markers of status is anatomized. Fungoso studies the sartorial refinements of Fastidius Brisk in order to effect a replica of his satin suit. Brisk, for his part, is concerned with gaining proximity to the more established courtier and knight, Puntarvolo. Puntarvolo, in turn, is impressed by the presence of the wealthy merchant Deliro. Clove and Orange, the interloping "twins of foppery", wish to impress by feigning scholarly discourse. All are preoccupied with status and self-absorbed to an almost solipsistic degree. Jonson here distils many of the characteristics that are consistent with consumer behaviour in a capitalist world, the desire to both identify with and stand apart from a group, and the way in which an at least symbolic affiliation with a community can be effected through attainment of the appropriate signifiers. The quest for relative forms of status is given especially comic but apt illustration through the exchanges that take place between Fungoso and Fastidius Brisk. Fungoso's perception of status as something that can be acquired through possession of the

appropriate signifiers is exposed as folly by the ease with which Brisk dispenses with his outfits, leaving Fungoso continually in pursuit of the latest fashion.

Surviving account books, like that of the gentleman, play-enthusiast, and aspiring courtier Edward Dering, suggest that “a sustained programme of personal self-fashioning and social self-advancement” was undertaken through the purchase of items as diverse as “lavishly fashionable suits” and “tooth powder and candles” (Smith, *Shakespeare’s First Folio* 7). For many like Dering, “the acquisition of a serious library of printed books and manuscripts” was a part of this personal enterprise (Smith, *Shakespeare’s First Folio* 15). Bonian and Walley, as stationers with books to sell, could not ignore the reality that the world they were operating in was rapidly transforming into a commodity culture. Nor could they ignore the corollary that people were increasingly being conceived as consumers defined by distinct tastes. Bonian and Walley seem to have had no qualms about harnessing the resources of genre to a pragmatic end, and their stopping the press to insert a new title-page and preface can be conceived as a moment epitomizing “the peculiar confusions and perplexities occasioned by market relations” (Agnew 7). The differences between a play in print and a play in performance are conspicuous, and the genre or genres assigned to a play in either medium are the consequence of these differences. Users of either medium have discrete expectations and texts will be repurposed to meet specific desires.

As a way of accounting for how the “cultural capital [which] accumulated at the top of the social hierarchy” became associated with certain commodities, Paul Yachnin borrows the term “Populuxe”. This term, which denotes “something that is both popular and deluxe” (307), is helpful in understanding the appeal of consumer items which enable a kind of symbolic proximity to the lives and manners of the social elite. Yachnin argues that, by way of its associations with the court, “Shakespeare’s theatre was one of the originating institutions of the market in populuxe goods” (315). The larger story, to borrow Agnew’s more general summation, is “how market relations are culturally reproduced and how, in that process, individuals come to see themselves in the likeness of commodities” (12). Eric Wilson observes that Marx, “[i]n introducing the concept of commodity fetishism, . . . repeatedly notes the ‘mystical character of commodities’, ‘the enigmatical character of the product of labour, so soon as it assumes the form of commodities’” (“Sign” 116). In the early modern period, an expansion in literacy, reflected on a material level in the proliferation of printed books, meant that reading

matter itself came to be suffused with an enigmatical quality. Endorsing the findings of Peter Clark, Heidi Brayman Hackel notes that “[o]nce largely the domain of social and intellectual elites, reading and book ownership had become available by 1600 to a broad range of English men and, to a lesser extent, women” (140). Of course, viewed from a modern vantage point, this kind of trend would appear to be wholly positive. But, as Diana Henderson notes, “[i]n the pre-democratic society of Shakespeare’s day . . . to be called ‘popular’ or ‘of the people’ was usually not a compliment” (13). The democratization of the printed word, made possible by the expansion of the print industry, therefore prompted an attendant desire for distinction. But if commodification was at the root of this problem, it also offered the panacea. Just like certain kind of clothes, certain kinds of books were able to function as social markers. As in the famous Anthony van Dyck portrait of Sir John Suckling posing with a Shakespeare Folio – one that is open at *Hamlet* – books could feature conspicuously in an individual’s self-presentation and even be involved in the “public construction of selfhood” (Smith, *Shakespeare’s First Folio* 16). Thus, for those purchasers wishing to take advantage of the mobility afforded by the emerging market economy, books could enable an at least symbolic association with a particular class or group of people. This idea of books as commodities was transforming the print market.

In the imagining and constructing of the purchasers of playbooks, then, stationers were aided somewhat by the social flux that was characteristic of the era. Indeed, the social backdrop against which the characters of Jonson’s *Every Man Out* are understood is one which the historical record supports. As Keith Wrightson notes, because of a complex interplay of historical forces, the medieval conception of a society arranged into a tripartite separation of “estates” had been subsumed by an “Elizabethan hierarchy of degrees . . . [more concerned] with the bald facts of relative wealth, status, and power” (43). The erosion of the noble estate thus brought about the conditions wherein a broadened conception of gentility accommodated not just prominent gentlemen but also those, like urban-based professionals, who had previously been excluded. Given the impossibility of establishing firm criteria, “[r]elative status emerged from the interplay of a range of variables” (Wrightson 44), and consequently stationers were able to appeal to the social aspirations of purchasers by offering symbolic participation in the different communities connoted by print genres. Thus, if the Renaissance theorist George Puttenham, in his *Arte of English Poesie*, implies “that

generic form is essentially social, establishing a connection between writer and audience” (Imbrie 62), this is only one of the possible relationships subtended by genre. Genre, because of its culturally-loaded nature, also provided stationers with a means of both creating and responding to the desires of book purchasers. For some would-be readers, purchase of a playbook may have functioned to reinforce a sense of entitlement that was being encroached upon by new social forces. For others, purchase may have offered a means of affecting that entitlement, of symbolically uniting themselves with a desired community. What has been noted as “the Renaissance preoccupation with the relation of generic form to moral value” (Imbrie 55) suggests how the import of a given genre could extend into a realm beyond the page.

### **The Stationers and their Imagined Genre Communities**

Alongside these first signs promising an early version of the commodity culture that has since become familiar, the classically inherited hierarchy of genres (Colie 7) was being modified under a more laissez-faire acceptance of genre-mixing that signalled a shift toward a less theorized and more consumer-oriented approach. If the public theatre was the key site of this transformation, in the realm of print it was stationers who recognized that possession of the appropriate social markers could constitute symbolic association with a desired class or group. Given that what was being rendered in print was initially conceived as drama, and that drama is, as Hans-Georg Gadamer observes “a kind of playing that, by its nature, calls for an audience” (109), the question of how the concept of audience could be signified through the processes of print was important. Effectively, this meant that stationers were involved in acts of interpellation whereby potential purchasers of playbooks were addressed in ways which labelled them and which prompted their identification with recognizable social groupings. The question of what kind of audience was being addressed therefore lay with the stationers. Here, the distinction between theatre and print is all-important because, where there is no actual face-to-face contact between audience members, appeals on the basis of imagined community are crucial. Altman makes note of “the ability of generic texts to imply or reflect the existence of absent community members and thus serve as a symbolic community meeting place” (172), and it is genre’s capacity to fulfil this social dimension that was of significance to stationers. Thus, while Berek posits that “single-play volumes are more closely allied with theatrical performance than with the reading public”

("Genre" 164), it is nevertheless with the construction of a reading public that the publishers of these volumes were concerned. The concept of generic community was grasped by stationers as one means towards the commercial end of matching a text with a particular niche market.

The marketing practices that became aligned with playbook publication are consequently expressive of the unique position which these books occupied within the print industry, and it is to this that recent scholarship has turned. Extending and challenging the work of Peter Blayney, Lesser and Stallybrass have determined that playbooks, while not selling in the same numbers as other publications in their initial print runs, became more profitable upon reprint and hence were attractive for stationers as long-term investments. Scholarly consensus, however, remains elusive on the commercial viability of playbooks, prompting Sonia Massai to make the less contentious assertion that "[w]hether relatively more or less profitable than other books, printed playbooks clearly represented a specialist type of publication" (*Shakespeare* 34). In addition to being distinct from other publications in degree, the texts contained within playbooks were fundamentally different by virtue of their genesis outside the print industry. If stationers at times wanted to position the purchasers of their playbooks in contradistinction to playgoers, this was nonetheless best achieved by references to the theatrical milieu that had generated the plays in the first place. Early modern plays, regardless of instantiation, were the products of a burgeoning theatre industry and this remains the case despite the fact that a traditional conception of playwrights as largely indifferent to the world of print publication has effectively been challenged (Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*). Even if it is possible that certain playwrights conceived of print as a medium more befitting their literary aspirations this should not, as Heather Hirschfield notes with regard to Shakespeare, prompt the assumption that "what counts most in assessing the nature and significance of dramatic authorship is the Shakespearean text's ultimate destination for either stage or page" ("Playwrighting" 16). For the early modern stationers whose task was to render dramatic texts suitable for publication, the residue of a work's theatrical incarnation would have been inescapable. Theatre, after all, was the dominant cultural form within the early modern period. The marketing practices of stationers were necessarily informed by this reality, and this is central to what sets playbooks apart from other publications.

For Bonian and Walley, what is important is the purchaser's willingness to identify with an imagined community as invoked through genre terms and it is this symbolic affiliation, as much as the actual quarto, that is being inveigled. The implicit corollary is that the unsophisticated, essentially those unable to appreciate the play's satirical tone and oblique mode of address, are to be denied participation in this symbolic community. To be one with the horde is clearly not a good thing and the publishers invoke distinctions where they can, suggesting that it is better to purchase the author's plays now rather than be among those who will "scramble for them" later. In an anticipation of Pierre Bourdieu's dictum that "tastes are perhaps first and foremost distastes" (56), Bonian and Walley posit a tension between vulgar appreciation and a more discerning appraisal that conjures a divide between different imagined communities. In the case of *Troilus and Cressida*, the kind of niche market most appealing to Bonian and Walley appears to be one reminiscent of that cultivated by the boys' companies of St. Paul's and Blackfriars. For some years after 1600 these boys' companies had specialized in satirical comedies, "seeking to create the consciousness of an in-group that would appreciate their railing" (Foakes, "Playhouses" 28) and "gaining increasing notoriety for the sophisticated satires in their repertory" (Gurr 369). So, just as use of the designation "history" in print would have appealed to a literary readership or those with literary pretensions, the invoking of satire, associated with the "anti-mimetic" dramaturgy of the boys' companies, is likely to have found a similarly discrete segment of the print audience. Sonia Massai has noted that "[r]eaderly paratexts, that is dedications, addresses to the reader and commendatory poems, were almost exclusively included in playbooks linked with the children's companies" and that this detail therefore makes the second state of *Troilus and Cressida* "resemble the bibliographical make-up of the playbooks associated with the children" ("Fortunes" 63, 67). Arguably, then, the very inclusion of a preface connotes generic affiliation with the more satirical mode popularized by the boys' companies. But the stationers' representation of the play as a particular kind of commodity is dependent on the purchaser's willingness to participate firstly in the larger community brought into existence by the market economy and, secondly, the smaller privileged community invoked by the stationers. As Ann Imbrie notes, the Renaissance doctrine of decorum that governed "the appropriate matching of style and genre" also referred to "the social world outside the literary system" (52). Because of the confluence of these two realms, genre could function metonymically for a

worldview aligned with a particular group or, at the very least, could gesture towards a group's reading habits or preferences. Augmented by print capitalism's propensity to bind together disparate purchasers under the banner of a discrete readership or, as Anderson would have it, an imagined community, this facility of genre – what Imbrie calls “generic attitude” (59) – made it possible to target the values of particular niche markets.

Arguably the vogue for satirical comedy, inaugurated by Jonson's *Every Man Out*, had by the time of *Troilus and Cressida*'s publication, become even more fully established. David Norbrook notes that it is possible that the Inns of Court milieu were Shakespeare's intended audience for *Troilus and Cressida* and that therefore the play targeted their “lively interest in rhetoric” (154). Roslyn L. Knutson observes that the composition date of *Troilus and Cressida* fits into a period in which dramatic satires first appeared in the repertory of the Chamberlain's Men and posits that, if the play was not performed at this time, the company “wasted a property that not only reflected the latest in dramatic genres but also used popular narrative material” (*Repertory* 99). But if this had been the case, from the publishers' perspective it was a waste that was entirely transmutable. If genres, as Rosalie Colie argues, constitute different ways of seeing or different fixes on the world, then the lapse between the composition of *Troilus and Cressida* and its publication may have enabled a new way of understanding it. The way of seeing the world that was distinct to satirical comedy – a way of seeing characterized by “an attitude of correction” (Imbrie 58) or a concern with “role-playing and particularly with attack and aggression in social activity” (Ostovich, *Every Man Out* 70) – was by 1609 an established reader position that could be channelled effectively for marketing purposes. It is possible, therefore, that Bonian and Walley could perceive the play in a way not accessible to an earlier audience, but it is also possible that gleaning the commercial viability of satirical comedy and then delineating the contours of that very genre in the play at hand constitutes only a short step. Of course, numerous critics have commented on the satirical aspects within *Troilus and Cressida*. Bevington, in his Arden 3 edition, notes the way in which the play subjects received notions of heroism to a sustained critique (19). With regard to the depiction of Ajax and Ulysses, Foakes notes that “Shakespeare developed further a satirical image [already implicit in the account by Ovid and accentuated in Arthur Golding's translation] of both Greek heroes” (*Shakespeare* 23). But whether or not the play's satirical elements can be considered

defining is, of course, the kind of conundrum attendant upon any act of genre designation (Altman 207). The designation on the original title-page, after all, averred that *Troilus and Cressida* be read as a history, so what is highlighted by a designation is not necessarily anything essential to the text but a reading position. The change in designation in this instance can be best understood as a decision made in a commercial context so as to attract a specific genre community.

### **Title-pages and Readerships**

Peter Berek observes that “[b]etween 1590 and 1616, 60 percent of 176 plays were designated by genre” (“Genres” 165) and that, in the seventeenth century there is also a “fading away of the old, ‘tragical history’, moralizing use of generic categories to validate fictions”. While this shift is consistent with an emerging perception of vernacular drama as literature (Berek “Genres” 168), its broad lineaments, whereby qualifying epithets gradually decrease in occurrence and single words take precedence, can also be situated within the process identified as “the slow and uncertain emergence of the substantive genres” (Frow 148). One reason why this process takes time is that it is not easy within a period of frenetic cultural production to delineate those textual features which will later appear defining. Typically, such acts of delineation occur only after a genre has attained industry-wide acceptance. In the context of Shakespeare, Graham Holderness notes that, “[v]irtually all of the plays designated as ‘histories’ in the Folio contents page were not so called on their initial publication” (4). In the Renaissance, too, even those substantive genres inherited from antiquity were subjected to a process of being reimaged, and the addition of numerous qualifying epithets is evidence of this. While single-word tags eventually returned, this nominal consistency arguably masked a revised conception of these genres that had emerged in response to the demands of vernacular theatre. Thus, while the single-word tags of substantive genres may suggest permanence, in actuality genres remain malleable and open to transformation. It is in a period of flux, as different stakeholders vie for control of discourse, that the contested nature of genre formation is most apparent.

The inclusion of explicit genre references on title-pages, however, does not tell the whole story. The stationers who designed title-pages were engaged in a symbolically freighted practice wherein the inclusion of certain typographical or bibliographical features could invoke, albeit in an oblique way, associations with specific genres.

Douglas Brooks, in considering the connotative significance of continuous printing – a way of presenting theatrical dialogue in a more readerly fashion – speculates (in light of some of Lesser’s findings) that “a specific readership’s familiarity with such features would enable it to readily distinguish their plays from less literary fare – in much the same way that publishers of romantic novels today rely on cover art to make their books instantly recognizable to a specific audience” (46-7). The implicit suggestion, that stationers marketed their plays by appealing to the desires of a particular readership, is consistent with Beebee’s assertion that the signifying practices of modern publishers, particularly as deployed through cover art, enable readers to identify the genres most likely to satisfy their demands. Beebee, in arguing that audiences fulfil different desires through different genres, makes reference to what he terms “the ideological core and the use value” of genre. Thus, for those involved in the marketing of works in print, it is important to have an understanding of what prospective purchasers are looking to the work to provide. In this sense, any analysis of a given genre “makes sense only when framed by the use-value that defines it” (Beebee 5). The same features, then, can take on an entirely different resonance when viewed from a different audience’s perspective.

Altman observes that “textual organization is controlled by discursive goals” and consequently the question that must be asked when assessing a given designation is “who speaks this generic vocabulary? to whom? and for what purpose?” (108). The situation is complicated even more by the fact that critics themselves are unlikely to be aware of their own premises and purposes (Rosmarin 8). Thus, in choosing to label a text a “tragedy”, critics will draw on their understanding of tragedy as gleaned through other texts. But the critic’s working definition of “tragedy” is also likely to be informed by the text under consideration if it suits the critic’s purpose for this to be the case. As a consequence, the generic definition adopted by critics in the explanation of a given text will also, whether consciously or not, be shaped by those same critics (Rosmarin 8) and a kind of self-authored syllogistic validity – if this text is an example of a tragedy, then the term “tragedy” denotes a text like this – will ensue. Altman uses the term “genrification” to describe how genres are ascribed to texts, but he also notes that outcomes can be unsettled by a subsequent process of “regenrification”. Thus, a text that is popularly conceived as a history may be reconceptualised as a comical satire through its repositioning within a different horizon of expectations. In this way, previously discrete texts may be “brought together by virtue of a new identification

with some common feature” (Altman 108). A focus on features not previously privileged can therefore enable a shift in generic alignment. Significantly, genre enables textual organization – a function arguably of more import than the categorization of texts – and a self-validating outcome can be the consequence.

Bonian and Walley attempt this realignment of text and genre in order to target a particular segment of the market for playbooks. Altman observes that generic references typically “play a part in an overall discursive strategy” but that “perhaps the most important tactic in the genre world consists in naturalizing one’s own discursive claims” (101). Bonian and Walley, then, while using genre to position the playbook to their own commercial advantage, foster the impression that its purchase will enable the desires of their targeted readership to be met. It is a characteristic of title-pages and other prefatory material that they enable vested interests to be disguised in this way because, as Genette observes, “the paratextual element is always subordinated to ‘its’ text, and this functioning determines the essence of its appeal and its existence” (12). Peripheral in both a formal and substantive sense, the paratext directs attention to the text. Consequently, the discourse employed through the paratext, although underlain by a commercial motive, must appear to serve an aesthetic end. Thus, the pragmatic purpose fulfilled by the genre designations and prefaces conceived by stationers was not usually made explicit. If the status of early modern playbooks as commodities was “an economic aspect of their identity fundamental to considering them as phenomena of a market society of producers and consumers, players and audiences” (Whitney 59), this was occluded by a rhetoric which took as its ostensible subject the playwright or the work itself. Consequently, while paratextual elements were clearly intended for, and often explicitly addressed to, those individuals whom stationers hoped would be purchasing their playbooks, “characterization of readers as buyers is the exception rather than the rule” (Clegg 31). The rhetoric deployed by stationers within title-pages and prefaces thus disguised their discursive investment, making the generic terms which they had authored appear to rise naturally from the text itself.

### **The Case of Jones’s *Tamburlaine***

The actions of Bonian and Walley in this instance, and their appreciation of the symbolic power of genre, signals a significant shift away from the practices of some early stationers publishing playbooks. Richard Jones’s printing of the anonymous 1590

octavo edition of the two parts of *Tamburlaine the Great* once again provides an example. In a preface addressed “To the gentleman readers and others that take pleasure in reading histories”, Jones states:

I have purposely omitted and left out some fond and frivolous jestures, digressing and, in my poor opinion, far unmeet for the matter, which I thought might seem more tedious unto the wise than any way else to be regarded – though, haply, they have been of some vain conceited fondlings greatly gaped at, what times they were showed upon the stage in their graced deformities. Nevertheless, now to be mixtured in print with such matters of worth, it would prove a great disgrace to so honourable and stately a history (73).

As Lyons observes, “[i]n scholarship, Jones has earned a reputation as an interventionist publisher” (“Jones” 150). In this instance, Jones’s strategy is to move beyond the paratext and make cuts to the play itself, and this action is in sharp distinction to Bonian and Walley’s focus on the paratext. Choosing to designate the play a history, Jones repositions the text, attempting to remove some of the residue of its theatrical origins in order to align it with a more literary tradition. Jones’s reconfiguration – a reconfiguration which is literal in that it involves the excision of material – is enacted so that the text will better meet the expectations of a new, more select audience in print. The comic interludes are therefore inconsistent with Jones’s vision of *Tamburlaine the Great* being “so honourable and stately a history”.

The comic interludes that Jones refers to may be “part of Marlowe’s original script or something added extempore by actors” (Dawson xliii). In either case, Jones’s decision to forego them – or to claim that he has – displays a remarkable confidence. It is as if, in print, the stationer knows best, and the intentions of others involved in the enterprise are no longer consequential. As Adrian Poole observes, “[m]ost drama, except the very short, . . . [is characterized by] variations of tempo, mood, texture, focus, or perspective” and “[a]s a local effect, a comic voice or scene assists the whole rhythm by heightening and lowering tension” (73). If the inclusion of such scenes helps to hold the audience’s attention, the stationer’s decision to forego these could be considered foolhardy. It is also curious, given “the gravity and dignity conferred by the most prestigious of literary genres” (Poole 75) that Jones largely eschews the designation of tragedy. His decision to do so can only be understood as an attempt to garner the approval of his intended purchasers. If genres are capable of generating different sets of expectations, the term

“History” is likely to have resonated for a particular kind of reader. Given that Jones is at pains to distance his edition of the play from the version performed on the public stage, it can be inferred that the publisher is not attempting to summon the appeal of dramatized history. Rather, as the title of his preface makes clear, this is intended for “the gentlemen readers and others that take pleasure in reading histories” (73).

*Tamburlaine* is here being passed off as a historical account – perhaps something to sit on the bookshelf alongside Herodotus – and something to be read in the same sober frame of mind. This is the power of genre that Jones draws upon.

Jones’s actions represent a radical instantiation of the process whereby early modern stationers sought the transfer of material from stage to print. Jones transcends, one could even say does violence to, the function of the publisher’s preface – what Genette terms an allographic preface – because he moves beyond its circumscriptions to the text itself. Of course, in order to accentuate specific textual elements and reshape perceptions of a given play, a straightforward strategy is to invoke the power of genre and, at least on a conceptual level, this is not dissimilar to what Jones is doing. The difference is that Jones undermines the symbolic power inherent in the title-page and his own self-penned preface and moves beyond them to the text itself, altering it to suit his preferred generic schema. Unlike Bonian and Walley, Jones does not attempt to erase the play’s theatrical origins and hopes that, for his readers, the two parts “will be now no less acceptable . . . than they have been, lately, delightful for many of you to see”. He flatters his “gentlemen readers” and implies that, although they are likely to have seen the play performed on stage, they comprise a wiser segment of the theatre audience, and are sensitive to the fact that the text can be made to fulfil different functions in different circumstances. The same text can even be made to assume the contours of different genres because it is a matter of use. Jones goes so far as to instruct his readers on this matter of use, and informs them it is appropriate to read this text “after your serious affairs and studies” (73).

In other ways, however, the actions of Jones are more consistent with later stationers like Bonian and Walley. It is noteworthy that Jones addresses his preface to “[t]he gentlemen readers and others”, using plural forms where it might reasonably be thought more appropriate to invoke the singular. Just like the community of theatre-goers who enjoyed the play in performance, Jones is imagining a community of readers who, while reading the play in solitude, also share a sense of solidarity with others like

themselves. While secondary discursivity – a marketing practice which “addresses the spectators’ relationship to other spectators” – is today intentionally adopted in order to encourage genre audience members’ symbolic association with each other (Altman 171-72), Jones’s invocation arguably reflects an untheorized grasp of how a reader’s identification with other readers may aid the selling of playbooks.

The preface also displays Jones’s awareness of how publication signals a shift away from the public experience of play attendance to a more private experience which entails a different mode of apprehension. Jones makes a virtue of literacy, privileging its attainment as a mark of distinction that enables more exclusive pleasures. Like those Dutch portraits of the seventeenth century which showed their subjects “posed with studied informality among the appurtenances of scholarship” (Sutton 32), “the gentleman readers” are here placed against a flattering backdrop and situated as members of a learned community. Jones imagines his readers in an atmosphere far removed from the stage and its “fond and frivolous jestures”. Jones’s pairing of a particular category (“gentlemen readers”) with a genre term (“history”) continues this kind of appeal, making explicit the concept of a genre community composed of like-minded individuals whose taste and learning set them apart. (In this way, the prologue makes conspicuous the discursive elements – the matter of who is being addressed by whom – that are typically overlooked when genre is presumed to be the outcome of textual features alone). Jones is a stationer concerned with the marketing of a playbook and, like any merchant, he attempts to position his wares to their best advantage. In doing so, of course, he is guided by an idea of the purchaser to whom he must appeal. Envisioning and simultaneously flattering this person as someone who, while open to the visceral thrill of theatre, is qualified to partake in the more refined pleasures offered by reading, Jones finds a way to navigate any uncertainty stemming from the still unsettled dispute over the status of playbooks. It is the versatility offered by genre that enables Jones to claim that, although these “tragical discourses” were a sensation upon the stage, away from the stage they are transformed into something entirely different and offer an entirely different experience to the reader.

Although distinct from an auctorial preface which presents or “forc[es] on the reader an indigenous theory defined by the author’s intention” (Genette 222), an allographic preface enables this space, and to some degree the authority of the author too, to be appropriated. It could be said that stationers like Jones, in the guise of channelling the

author's intentions, urge their own upon the reader. As Genette notes, a concern with genre definition is a characteristic of "transitional" periods "when writers seek to define such deviations in relation to an earlier norm whose authority still carries weight" (224). The early modern era, characterized by a drama which appropriated medieval and classical traditions and turned them to new ends, constitutes one such transition. I further argue that within that era the shift from stage to print constitutes another important transition, and that the interest which stationers display in genre can be understood within this context. In this space, there are conspicuous attempts to effect the shift to a new medium through the manipulation of genre designations. Admittedly, a preface can be understood as constituting "an unbalanced and even shaky situation of communication" because "its author is offering the reader an advance commentary on a text the reader has not yet become familiar with" (Genette 237). But for early modern publishers of playbooks, keen to foster new audiences distinct from those of the theatre, the inequality inherent in this state of affairs constituted an opportunity, and they could shape plays almost as they wished. The willingness of stationers to capitalize on this also suggests why in some instances theatrical failures and plays that had long since fallen from the repertory seem to have been deliberately sought out. As Eoin Price notes in the context of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, "[p]aradoxically, the play is easier to recuperate if it is a complete disaster" (48). A play which had received only one performance, like *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, would offer greater opportunity for a stationer's reinvention. In this regard, the preface conferred a power on its author that the publishers of playbooks were not slow to capitalize on.

Jean Howard observes that "[i]n many cases . . . the conventions governing a particular genre do not encompass all the aspects of a given text. Some of those same features, along with others, become *significant in a new way* if mobilized under another generic banner" ("Shakespeare" 299, italics in original). In this chapter, I have argued that an awareness of this capacity of genre was intrinsic to the practice of stationers, and that they were ever conscious of how texts could be transformed when different features were privileged. This understanding was central to how they positioned their playbooks to appeal to different readerships. It is true that the commercial interests of stationers necessarily informed the nature of the designations they ascribed to texts. But pragmatic practices influence the aesthetic realm, and it must be conceded that the strategies by which stationers invoked genre thereby contributed over time to

processes of genre formation. In attempting to harness the power of genre to suit their own pragmatic purposes, stationers behaved no differently to any of the other stakeholders involved in the production and consumption of early modern drama. Playwrights, companies, and critics also asserted specific reading positions in order to achieve pragmatic ends and, far from being anomalous, the interventions of stationers participated in this broader process of generic contestation between stakeholders operating in the early modern period.

## Chapter Five – The First Folio and its Compilers

*Mr William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories and Tragedies*, the title adorning the First Folio of 1623, makes conspicuous the triumvirate of genres into which the volume's plays are organized. A claim about the significance of the author is made explicit by the title, and this claim is reinforced by the folio format, the inclusion of commendatory verses, and the Martin Droeshout portrait of Shakespeare among the prefatory matter. In this chapter, I argue that the dialectic between author and genre is crucial to understanding both the material interests driving the Folio's publication, and the Folio's instantiation of the symbolic processes whereby Shakespeare's lasting fame was achieved. I contend that institutional demands specific to Folio publication meant that the figure of the playwright was awarded prominence, and that the compilers of that volume drew on the resources of genre in order to cultivate the necessary esteem. This reliance on genre can be understood as a necessary manoeuvre at a historical moment when the figure of the author had not yet assumed cultural prominence. The compilers, rather than assuming a pre-condition of interest in their author, set about generating that interest, and genre was integral to their enterprise. Specifically, this account privileges the role played by the category of "Histories", and argues that it is this category more than any other which enabled the processes whereby Shakespeare ultimately came to be considered apart from his peers.

Understanding the First Folio as instrumental in the creation of the esteem that has been granted Shakespeare runs counter to a more familiar narrative. It has become almost unexceptional to claim that the publication of the First Folio was a consequence of the esteem awarded Shakespeare within his own time. In his introduction to the *Norton Shakespeare*, Stephen Greenblatt asserts that "[Shakespeare's] genius was recognized almost immediately" ("Introduction" 1), citing as partial evidence for this the famous commendatory lines composed by Ben Jonson that are displayed prominently within the Folio's paratext. This tendency, to assume that Shakespeare's pre-eminence was as axiomatic in his own day as it has proved to be in ages since, persists despite the best efforts of scholars involved in examining the pragmatics of early modern performance. The evidence, however, suggests that the esteem awarded Shakespeare's achievements as a dramatist was largely a belated phenomenon. As Emma Smith notes, "given our reverence for Shakespeare it's salutary to see that now largely-forgotten plays such as Samuel Daniel's *Mucedorus*, Christopher Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*, and

Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* are all more widely reprinted in the same period than any of Shakespeare's" (*Cambridge Introduction* 49). Reverence for Shakespeare can also shape the contours of scholarly research for, as Adam G. Hooks observes, "recent revisionist work continues to be motivated by an essentially biographical interest in the individual" (*Selling Shakespeare* 6). Hooks' own concern lies in how "[the] book trade constructed and, over time, transformed Shakespeare's reputation", a process he traces to the early publication of Shakespeare's narrative poems *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594). Shakespeare's identity as a poet, however, was ultimately to be overtaken by the status granted him as a playwright (*Selling Shakespeare* 4-5), and this underscores the significance of the period following the publication of the First Folio. This is consistent with this chapter's claim that the collected volume inaugurated processes of canonization which were instrumental in the creation of Shakespeare's fame.

The First Folio is routinely thought to be the result of "a collaboration between the stationers, Isaac Jaggard and Edward Blount, and the veteran King's Men actors, John Heminge and Henry Condell" (Smith, *Shakespeare's First Folio* 6). This default position, however, rests on some questionable assumptions. While it is very difficult to identify with any precision the roles played by those involved, when it comes to the actual editing of the volume it can be conceded that Shakespeare's fellow actors who enabled the provision of the plays are less likely candidates. The editing of the plays, and the arrangement of the paratextual features surrounding them, demanded expertise which Heminge and Condell did not have. Thus, in assigning agency for the Folio's Catalogue, its triumvirate of genres and the arrangement of texts therein, it is necessary to look for other candidates. In this context, the involvement of Shakespeare's fellow playwright Ben Jonson deserves consideration and, as Donaldson notes, there are a number of reasons for supposing Jonson's involvement in the production of Shakespeare's First Folio. Heminge and Condell, by way of their profession, are likely to have had "a strong working relationship with Jonson"; he was "the leading dramatist of the day, a former friend and colleague of Shakespeare, and a man experienced, as they were not, in the ways of printers and booksellers" (Donaldson, "Prose contributions" n.p.). Jonson also had a keen interest in genre, a fact in evidence throughout his career, and one emblematically displayed on the engraved title-page of his own Folio (1616) which in effect constitutes "a pictorial essay on the dramatic kinds" (Danson 16). Inside that

volume, a concern with genre remains conspicuous, so much so that for Bevington the prologue to the revised *Every Man in his Humour* “identifies Jonson as critical heir to Sir Philip Sidney’s *Defence of Poesy*” (CWBJ EMI 624). Such considerations caution against the tendency to discuss the Shakespeare Folio as a *sui generis* achievement, a tendency which mirrors and reinforces the exclusivity assigned to Shakespeare himself. The Shakespeare Folio instead needs to be understood dialectically against the model presented by Jonson’s earlier volume, particularly with regard to its treatment of genre, and more generally, against a tradition wherein literary prestige was conferred through the type of publishing which these editions exemplify. Of course, no volume has the power to grant long-lasting fame, and Shakespeare’s cultural standing was not secure in the decades that followed the publication of the First Folio. But when that esteem did start to accrue, and the Exclusion crisis (1668-72) that beset the reign of Charles II has been cited as an especially important moment in this regard (Depledge *passim*), the First Folio and its later iterations functioned as a form of symbolic assurance, an integer of Shakespeare’s significance.

### **The treatment of genre within Jonson’s Folio: a precursor**

The title-page of the 1616 folio, “designed, almost certainly under Jonson’s personal direction” (Donaldson, CWBJ 4.611), is a testament to the power inherent in genre as an institution and to Jonson’s desire to capitalize on this. In an era that could be niggardly in the esteem awarded authors, Jonson appears to have intuitively grasped the precariousness of his publishing venture, and recognized that his own claim for inclusion in the canon could not be made on the basis of name or personal reputation alone. Genre, in effect, offered Jonson the means by which the recent past, and his work that belonged to it, could be legitimated. But if the early modern period, as I have argued, inaugurated a break with the genres of the classical past and enabled a new system of commercial genres, Jonson’s engraved classical relief – as is true of many a façade – invites more than a cursory glance. While the device plays on connotations of solidity and permanence through its evocation of a distant past, it also gestures towards the falsity of its claim, making clear that its real point of departure is not the classical world but the contemporary world. Like the fake ruins or follies that for aristocrats of a later century would prove to be fashionable garden ornaments, Jonson’s classical relief is not intended to be taken for the real thing.

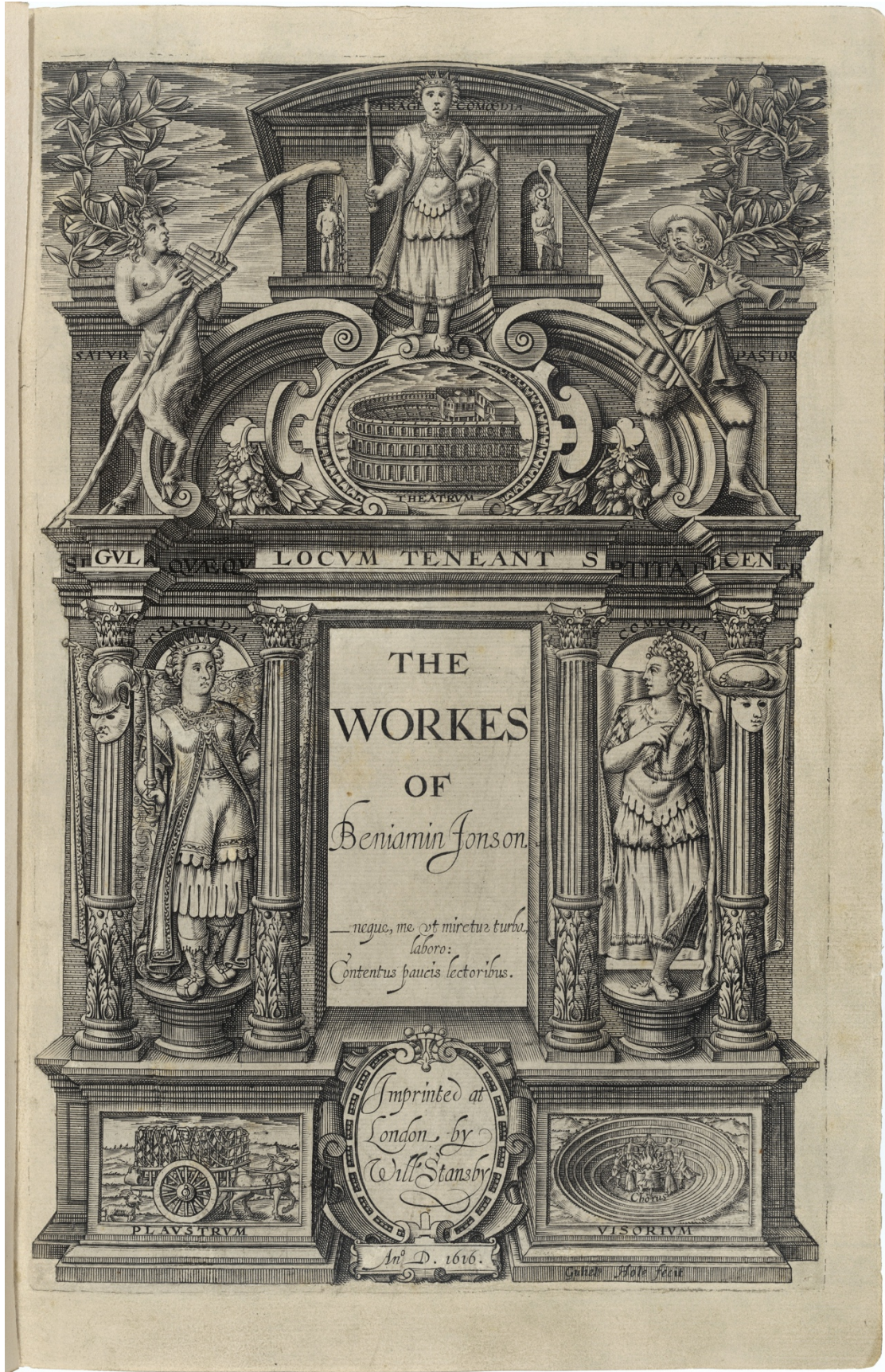


Figure 2. Title page, Ben Jonson, *The Workes of Benjamin Jonson* (London: Will Stansby, 1616), Folger STC 14751 Copy 1. (CC-SA-BA 4.0) <https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/105qvk>

Jonson's title-page echoes the frontispiece of another famous folio – that which had adorned the recently published *Works* of King James – and this makes it clear that imitation, not authenticity, is the key note. Ostensibly, by suggesting a correlation between an only recent past and a more distant one, the engraving serves as a kind of premature aging device, but one that draws attention to its own contrivance. Thus, a paradox emerges: the invitation to consider the classical past only prompts the realization that the recent past, despite a veneer of age, is not old in the same way. The façade, in effect, must be able to withstand this implicit tension, and there are also other signs of stress. The Horatian tag across the pediment, the imperative to keep each kind in its place which is “the motto of literary decorum” (Danson 18), cannot even be said to fit Jonson's own practice (Donaldson, *CWBJ* 4.613). Even more tellingly, occupying the central position at the top of the edifice, is Tragicomedy, a new and fashionable dramatic genre which has no rightful place in a classical façade. Jonson's relationship to both the present and the past is complicated, and this depiction of the genres he has inherited, which the practice of both he and his contemporaries has modified, is emblematic of that.

While the title-page of Jonson's *Works* fulfils a memorial function through its ostensible evocation of a distant past, a competing framework also makes its claim. For the Jacobean, the allegorical figures depicted standing within alcoves and the classical tag inscribed on the pediment were symbolically resonant of a worldview largely consigned to the past. Given that the world to which such devices once belonged had been eclipsed, the extent to which they can suggest solidity and permanence – the ostensible reason for their inclusion – is inevitably qualified. Their inclusion thus points to a contrivance, one which is key to the work which Jonson is employing genre to do. Jonson's real concern is with the present, and the past is only important in so far as it is useful for present purposes. Jonson clearly wishes to have assigned to his own works the positive connotations that such devices might confer, but he does not want to import an irrelevant worldview – or an irrelevant system of genres – in the process.

Ben Jonson's Folio was the first to include dramatic works and, because these were not widely considered serious literature at the time – even Jonson's use of the signifier “Works” prompted some mockery (Donaldson, *Life* 326-27) – their inclusion in a prestigious format would have been striking for contemporaries. Given that Shakespeare's First Folio was wholly dedicated to dramatic works, the precedent set by

Jonson must be understood as significant in easing the path for the later volume. If the title-page of Jonson's *Works* draws on the institution of genre in order to align the author with a classical tradition, the effect of the Catalogue within Shakespeare's First Folio can be understood in comparable terms. As Susan Snyder observes, "[t]he organizational principle they chose, which is featured as well in the title of the collection – *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies* – invites readers of Shakespeare's plays to read in the light of genre, apprehending family resemblances within each group as well as individual distinctions" (Snyder 83). Titles are always significant in that they generate expectations about the kind of content that will be encountered and, in this instance, the use of genre categories is consistent with this function. Steve Neale notes that genres are not just categories determined by textual features but comprise "systems of expectation and hypothesis" that enable key aspects of the work to be anticipated (32). What is important, once again, is the matter of how the genre is being used and what it is being used to achieve.

The significance of genre within the First Folio, and in Jonson's earlier *Works*, stands in dialectical relation to the author figure at this moment in history. Of course, Jonson's poem at the head of the Folio claims that Shakespeare "was not of an age, but for all time", and this has been read as an endorsement of a prestige that had already accrued to Jonson's fellow playwright. Indeed, the assumption that Jonson was merely stating a self-evident truth may account for the complacency with which the claim has been accepted. But this, once again, is to read the evidence the wrong way around. For while much has been made of the concern Jonson demonstrated over the fate of his own reputation in posterity, critics have been less forthcoming in the recognition that Jonson expended a comparable act of imagination over his late friend. But, as Donaldson observes, Jonson's praise should not be taken as representative of a widely held view: "[n]o one until this time had spoken of Shakespeare in such magisterial terms, placing him confidently above his English peers and 'all, that insolent Greece, or haughtie Rome' had hitherto achieved" ("Synchrisis" 176). The historicist who does not heed Donaldson's pragmatic point about Jonson's words runs the risk of assuming that the status of Shakespeare in his own time was consistent with the assessments of later generations. Jonson was a man who understood the significance of the folio format, and he clearly had a vested interest in ensuring that it was used to his friend's advantage. Despite the disparity in fame that would ensue between Jonson and Shakespeare in posterity,

Jonson could at this historical moment afford to be generous: in 1623 he was England's most famous living poet. But Jonson's view of Shakespeare was not representative of a wider esteem but a bid to build that esteem; it was not a popular opinion but a personal one. Expressing that opinion in print, however, in a volume that would transcend its own cultural moment, was to make a difference to Shakespeare's fate. Jonson's poem, with its prominent paratextual placement, represents nothing less than a bid for Shakespeare's inclusion in the canon and sets the tone for how the works within the Folio are to be read. Given Jonson's respect for the achievements of the classical world, his placement of Shakespeare within this pantheon is significant. The intention of conferring dignity on the author of the plays, and on the plays themselves, is obvious.

The three categories decided upon enabled genre to function as an organizing principle for a large body of work, but they also fulfilled another function. As Altman puts it, "institution after institution has used whatever product it produces as an act of criticism designed to reconfigure previous [texts] and thus to define genres in a manner that suits its own institutional needs" (48). The compilers of the First Folio, faced with a variety of texts and a variety of designations that had previously been assigned to a number of these texts in quarto, sought a solution consistent with the demands of their own institution. Inevitably, this involved revision of the designations originally assigned those plays published in quarto, and this is consistent with how genre as a socially construed institution is remade across time. The category of the History play is perhaps most emblematic of this process in that it enabled a number of diverse plays to be organized under one banner and, in doing so, encouraged a unified reading position. If the new genre of Tragicomedy in the façade depicted on Jonson's title-page is emblematic of the false history that accompanies moments of generic origin, the category of Histories in the First Folio can be understood in comparable terms. It is arguably the "Histories" category which demonstrates most clearly how the compilers drew on the resources of genre.

The category of "Histories" in the First Folio comprises ten plays. They are sequenced chronologically by subject matter, rather than date of composition, and the significance of this, especially in imparting an ideological function which suited the moment of the Folio's publication, should not be underestimated. Apart from *King Henry VIII*, the plays under this designation had all first been performed more than two decades prior to the publication of the First Folio. In 1623, the influence exercised by stakeholders at the

point of production or at the point of first publication in quarto would have largely receded. At this temporal remove, the compilers were in effect granted the power to influence how these plays would be read. Nevertheless, the task of the compilers was not easy for, as Frederic Jameson observes, “the farther a given text is removed from a performing situation . . . the more difficult will it be to enforce a given generic prescription on a reader” (135). In this fresh context, the power of the folio format cannot be underestimated. If these plays had not previously been perceived in any straightforward way as belonging to something called the history genre, this only emphasizes the significance of the folio format in fostering a perception of these plays, detached from their original performance context, as textual embodiments of English history.

This assertion which the “Histories” category makes can mask a number of other issues. The pre-eminence which the Shakespearean genre has earned cannot be said to have accrued as a logical consequence of the coherence of those representations. Numerous critics have noted the arbitrariness inherent in Shakespeare’s treatment of English history. David Kastan notes that “[n]o single model of history emerges from the plays” and that instead “Shakespeare experiments with various formal strategies . . . often in improbable mixtures that bring incompatible versions of history into contact and conflict” (Introduction 12). Graham Holderness observes that although the plays “have traditionally been framed within Tudor and Jacobean attempts to construct a national history”, postmodern approaches tend towards an understanding of these plays as “a discrete collection of dramatic exercises” (8). Jean Howard points to a further complication when she notes that “[w]hen speaking of the Elizabethan history play, critics tend to limit the genre to *the kind of play* Shakespeare made popular” (“Other Englands” 122, italics added). But if, as Kastan suggests, *the kind of play* this is cannot be clearly delineated, how is it possible for critics to use it as a model? The paradox is that the Shakespearean history genre has assumed a redoubtable cultural significance despite the fact that it is difficult to define the genre with any precision. Observations like these sit uneasily alongside each other, but the validity of each is routinely accepted by Shakespeare scholars. It is something of a conundrum that a genre which lacks an agreed-upon set of features is so recognizable. Accordingly, my emphasis in this chapter is not on any attempt at definition but on the use-value which the genre held for the compilers of the First Folio and for the readers of that volume. Understanding the

genre's use-value for these stakeholders helps to explain the processes whereby the genre, despite effectively being confined to the canon of one writer, has become so accepted and recognizable.

It is possible to understand the anomalies inherent within the Folio's category of Histories, and in turn to understand how the genre is bound up with the figure of the author, by adopting a broader perspective. Genres typically become fully established by way of a number of criteria being satisfied but the History genre does not conform to these in a straightforward way. Critically assessing the History genre against these criteria reveals its constructed nature. According to Miller, genres are usually defined according to "rhetorical substance (semantics), form (syntactics), or the rhetorical action the discourse performs (pragmatics)" (24), and against each of these the Shakespearean History genre can be assessed.

### **The Shakespearean History Genre: some qualifications**

Although the Shakespearean history play is generally considered to be a phenomenon of the 1590s, the variation in generic affiliation across playbook title-pages indicates that these plays were not initially perceived as participating in one overarching and unifying genre known as "History". Snyder posits that "[e]ven in Shakespeare's time, it was easier to recognize the history play than to define it" (90). However, the variety of designations applied to the Shakespearean "history" plays in their quarto editions suggests that even this kind of intuitive recognition may have been lacking when these plays were first being produced in the 1590s. Thus, while the claim that these plays are representative of the history genre now appears uncontroversial, the plays' first audiences may not have considered the historical content of the plays defining, and it is possible that these plays were originally considered "historical" only in an adjectival sense. Understood in this way, *I Henry IV* becomes a historical comedy while a play like *Richard III* becomes a historical tragedy. This highlights the difficulty of defining a genre like History, and it might appear that other genres such as Tragedy (which convention says ends in death) and Comedy (which convention says ends in marriage) are capable of making more straightforward claims. As a consequence, the historical setting becomes merely a lens through which comic or tragic concerns are inflected, and the conventions of these genres become the defining elements. Within their own historical

moment then, the History plays might be understood as participating in a series of cycles organized around the familiar concerns of more established genres.

Given that the historical content of these plays does not always make a straightforward claim to being defining, the distinction between one kind of play and another can be difficult to locate. As has been noted of *Macbeth* and *Richard III*, both are plays “drawn from historical sources . . . [that thematize] a tyrant’s rise, . . . downfall and death”, and yet the first is labelled a tragedy while the second is labelled a history (Danson 14). So that they could align with the overarching narrative engendered by the First Folio’s sequencing, the genre references and paratextual details of some plays required emendation. The title-page of the First Quarto of *Richard III* had referred to the play as: “The Tragedy of King Richard the third. Containing, His treacherous Plots against his brother Clarence: the pittiefull murder of his innocent nephews: his tyrannical usurpation: with the whole course of his detested life, and most deserved death”. The Folio version, while retaining the word “Tragedy”, alters everything else. Within the category of “Histories”, the play becomes: “The Tragedy of Richard the Third: / with the Landing of Earle Richmond, and the / Battell at Bosworth Field”. The changes here suggest a shift away from the character of Richard himself towards the events he participated in and the other historical figures he encountered. In this shift towards might be considered the cold historical facts, figures and events which do not feature significantly within the play are given precedence. The play itself however, as Smith observes, resists this kind of teleological reading (*Approaching Shakespeare*). As the title-page of the quarto suggests, the personality of Richard dominates the play and Richmond is an inconsequential player in comparison. To borrow Wilder’s terms, it could be said that Richard’s death in the play then conveys “a sense of an ending”, one which draws attention away from the more prosaic matter of historical continuance. The First Folio compilers, unlike the publishers of the first quarto version, were less interested in the sensational figure at the centre of the play, and more interested in ensuring that the play’s significance as part of a historical sequence was not elided.

Even a play like *Henry V*, which might seem to reside without controversy in the History genre, nevertheless contains warring elements that could, in the right circumstances, usurp even that designation. As Richard Helgerson notes, “[i]f one thinks of the radical divorce this play enacts between the king and his people . . . the play is

indeed tragic. But in another, more familiar sense, . . . the story ends in traditional comic fashion with a marriage” (232). Thematically, then, while it might be possible to make qualified claims that the play is tragic, the play is also comedic in parts. The semantic content of some of these plays – a key criterion in order for a genre to be recognized – is therefore not historical in any straightforward way. Consequently, the extent to which these plays are about history has to be qualified.

If genres are also identified by way of unity in form, presumptions about the historical content of these plays can also obscure the fact that there are a range of syntactic variations on display. The comic structure of *Henry V* is readily apparent through the play’s ending in a marriage, and *Richard III* appears to eschew the sense of renewal that is vital to the History genre by ending with the death of Richard. As in *Hamlet*, a play which in the popular imagination is almost an archetypal tragedy, the conclusion of *Richard III* is concerned with the tragic fate of its protagonist rather than with the details of royal succession. What will come after is less a matter for concern as what has been and, in this way, it is inherently tragic. Anomalously, Shakespearean history plays employ a variety of formal features and, taken as a group, display little syntactic unity. Nevertheless, “the category of historical drama, the ‘history play’, has seemed, certainly to modern criticism, the simplest and least controversial of the three major forms established by the Folio” (Holderness 4).

Genres can be defined according to the different kinds of rhetorical actions they achieve (Miller 24) – a tragedy will elicit an emotional response different to a comedy – but the plays within the Histories category are not wholly unified in this way because they display more than one rhetorical end. A character like Richard II invites parallels with tragic heroes such as Hamlet (“egotism, self-consciousness and verbal brilliance”), Lear (“a pale simulacrum of Lear’s growth from arrogance to humility”), and Brutus in *Julius Caesar* (“misguided commitment to political assassination”) (Forker 3-4). The play therefore encourages the kind of emotional investment that is consistent with tragedy. But while tragedy is one way of reading history, a story that details the rise and fall of a king ultimately ends in a kind of full stop. Audiences may very well expect tragedies to deliver such self-contained stories, but the kind of emotional investment this demands may be inconsistent with the genre of History. The effect generated by the ending of a History is different in that it conveys a sense of historical continuance. This means that a

protagonist's fate must ultimately be subsumed within a broader historical narrative and an ongoing story.

Two other plays wherein historical content appears tangential to audience appeal are worth noting. As Kastan notes, the "great expectations of pleasure" which *1 Henry IV* generates for audiences have resulted from "the comic action and, in particular, from the character of Falstaff" (Introduction 2). Given that the play's appeal resides in a fictional character who is ancillary to the historical content, the extent to which this play can be considered historical in a substantive sense is qualified. The set of expectations which audiences bring to this play – the anticipation of a particular kind of emotional experience – are in reality more consistent with the effects (what Miller would term the rhetorical action) produced by the genre of Comedy. Similarly, it has been observed that audience engagement with *King Richard III* appears to depend on aligning the protagonist with figures associated with genres other than History. Richard therefore makes sense to audiences as a "formal vice", a "murderous machiavel", or a "deep tragedian" (Siemon 6-13).

### **The Interpreter's Purposeful Act**

These objections call attention to the significance of the interpretive position of the Folio compilers in creating a category termed "Histories", listing a number of plays under it, and determining the reading position brought to these plays. The decisions made by the compilers were therefore crucial in determining perception of these plays and, although the plays themselves are largely the result of production practices that occurred in the 1590s, the genre itself was by no means self-evident. Given this, prior to the processes inaugurated by the First Folio, even the term "History" when used in a dramatic context was not a straightforward assertion. G. K. Hunter notes that the history play is only a brief moment in dramatic history and that the perception that it occupies "a significant space on the generic map" can be ascribed to "[t]he power of Shakespeare's representations" ("Elizabethan" 255). These representations, of course, were not considered all together under one category until the First Folio. Prior to this moment, the extent to which the term "History" referred to a category of plays defined by historical content is subject to qualification. To take one example, the play now generally known as *1 Henry IV* is referred to as *The History of Henrie the Fourth* on the title-page of its 1598 quarto edition. But given the semantic slippage inherent in the

term “History”, Kastan observes that its usage in this instance “cannot, then, be confidently understood as a specific generic assertion” (Introduction 8). In contrast with this kind of usage, Kastan notes that “the category of ‘Histories’ in the 1623 Folio is clearly making a generic claim” (Introduction 8). In part, this is because “genre seems especially powerful in the 1623 folio; the classificatory terms provide the principle of organization for the volume” (Berek, “Genres” 159). The compilers thus made a strong assertion when they grouped a number of plays under the category of “Histories”, organized them according to chronology, and included them alongside two well-established genres: “Tragedies” and “Comedies”.

Adena Rosmarin has considered the significance of what she terms “the interpreter’s purposeful act” in shaping genres and the perceptions brought to them. Rosmarin observes that “it is only by deciding on a set of ‘lexicons and codes’ (or, what is effectively the same, a ‘group of texts’ that seem their transparent embodiment) that . . . [a way can be found] of doing criticism” and that “the critic’s starting place . . . must seem found or discovered, not made or chosen” (5). The Folio compilers, in deciding on the texts for each of their three categories, assumed this interpretive role and in doing so “shaped the generic definition” (Rosmarin 8) that was then used to explain the texts. Because genre critics routinely “delineat[e] their field of enquiry” by limiting the number of texts under discussion, a strategy which functions to locate the genre “in the texts themselves taken as a group” (Altman 85), the editorial decisions made by the First Folio compilers can be understood as achieving a comparable end. The aim, of course, is “to find a group of texts that present themselves as ultimate and natural”, and this kind of critical practice “commits the investigator to interpretation as a prior step in his [sic] investigation” (McCanles, cited Rosmarin 5). For Rosmarin, this endorses the possibility that “the interpreter’s purposeful act” is what constitutes the genre. In the case of Shakespeare’s “Histories”, because “diversity is seen as the keynote of this loose generic grouping” (Smith, *Histories* 39), the idea that the genre itself originated with an act of interpretation on the part of the compilers does not seem outlandish.

The absence of a uniting set of features in the plays designated as Histories in Shakespeare’s First Folio thus foregrounds the significance of the editorial decisions made by the compilers of that volume. This opens up a further possibility that the unity of this group of plays is not demonstrable beyond the obvious level of corpus. Indeed, in many ways this would appear the most logical conclusion. The alternative to this

conclusion is encapsulated in the bind presented by Paulina Kewes: “Does the evidence of the plays themselves support the existence of a distinctive genre of the history play? Generations of critics have thought so, and have striven to describe this elusive generic entity” (171). But the terms “distinct” and “elusive” are not complementary, and their presumably unironic invocation points to the essence of the problem: something that is distinct shouldn’t be so hard to locate. This helps to explain how genres can serve a multitude of users and how, while a text may ostensibly “belong” to a single genre, not all users of the text will read it according to that genre. In the context of the First Folio, the fact that dramatic history was not as yet associated with a recognizable corpus meant that the compilers were free to define according to their own conceptual needs. At this historical moment, the interpreter’s purposeful act could, given the right circumstances, function as a serious intervention.

Given that the legitimacy of some of these designations may depend on a kind of syllogistic logic which, once exposed, unravels the previously accepted ties between text and genre, it is perhaps not surprising that not everyone immediately shared the compilers’ interpretive position. Perhaps given the nature of the disparities inherent within the grouping, almost a century after publication of the First Folio, the validity of the Shakespearean History genre could still be questioned. Nicholas Rowe, in his introduction to the first scholarly edition to the works of Shakespeare in 1709-10, pronounced that “[h]is plays are properly to be distinguished only into comedies and tragedies. Those which are called histories, and even some of his comedies, are really tragedies, with a run or mixture of comedy amongst them” (cited Smith, *Histories* 7). In this can be gleaned the overhang of a preference – easily observable in Sidney’s *Apology* and to some degree even in William Scott’s *Model of Poesy* (c.1599) which aimed to reconcile classical edicts to contemporary practice – for the time-honoured forms of classical genre, in particular that of tragedy, and a distrust of a vernacular form less beholden to tradition.

Today, although the genre is well-established, scholars are still finding fresh evidence which places pressure on any complacent acceptance of the term “Shakespearean History”. Following a spate of research into authorial attribution, the *New Oxford Shakespeare Complete Works* (Taylor, Jowett, Bourus, Egan 2016) is the first scholarly edition to conclusively identify the presence of Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Nashe, and at least one other anonymous hand across the *Henry VI* plays. Particularly with

regard to Marlowe's involvement, this confirms what was once memorably identified as "a fascinating case of theatrical and stylistic interchange between the two dramatists that suggests something approaching symbiosis" (Forker 61). The age-old question as to which dramatist exercised the greater influence on the other is therefore not settled but richly complicated. And the corollary for scholars is that the epithet of "Shakespearean", long appended to the term "history play" and for many almost synonymous with a discrete form of Elizabethan drama, is to some extent open to qualification.

### **Tracing origins: the History play as cycle**

A company's desire to assert ownership of its material by capitalizing on its strengths means that genre formation in the early modern era, or what is retrospectively construed as genre formation, can be understood as emerging as an almost accidental by-product of other forces. This is exemplified in the association between the Queen's Men and – what would later be deemed – the genre of the history play. The company – while indebted to the clowning of the famed Richard Tarlton – drew on a number of sources for what would become known as their company style. Although genre histories typically trace a linear process, in their history of the Queen's Men, Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean recognize a confluence of factors and evoke a messier reality behind the company's association with the English history play. As the authors put it, "[a]mong the commercial companies, it is possible to think that the Queen's Men invented the English history play . . . however, [this] is not quite right. They 'came upon' the English history play – inventing the genre was never part of their endeavour, because they were looking for something else" (167). The "something else" in this instance was a kind of drama that would display the company's ability to mount large cast productions in a style that could not be easily imitated by rival companies. Indeed, it would appear that what has been taken as the defining characteristic of these plays – their use of historical content – was not even an especially significant concern for the Queen's Men themselves. As McMillin and MacLean note, "they were staging the 'true' history of this, and the 'true' tragedy of that . . . the intention was to be 'true' and to be men of the queen's patronage" (167). In this way, the Queen's Men plays were clearly conceived as a cycle – a group of plays that appealed on the basis of a particular combination of recognizable elements and which took advantage of the strengths of the company. The stand-alone substantive "History" had not yet emerged as a designator of this style of

play. Even the term “true”, in its early modern usage, would have conveyed ambiguity for, as Graham Holderness observes, “‘truthfulness’ could be thought of in threefold ways: either as accuracy or fidelity to record; as verisimilitude, a convincing plausibility; or as the revealed truth of moral instruction and providential wisdom” (46). Thus, the epithet “true”, while so prevalent in the titles of the Queen’s Men plays, may not have signified anything defining about the company’s approach to its subject matter.

While the Queen’s Men “came upon” some aspects constitutive of what would ultimately become known as the history play, it would be the Chamberlain’s Men who would borrow from their rivals in order to gain an advantage of their own. McMillin and MacLean’s claim, however, that “[t]he Chamberlain’s Men made their career in large part on the basis of the connected series of English history plays which Shakespeare wrote for them by the turn of the century” (165), elides the extent to which each of these plays occupied a discrete repertory moment. As Holderness notes, it “seems highly improbable that in the theatre of their origin these plays were ever performed as a ‘sequence’, as ‘tetralogies’, or in chronological order” (1-2). Of course, exceptions may be granted. The Chamberlain’s Men, for example, already had two parts of the *King Henry VI* sequence before acquiring the play now known as *1 King Henry VI*, and this might suggest a desire for completion. Similarly, Knutson notes that two-part plays (like *Tamburlaine*) were performed together once both parts were introduced to the repertory, but the extent to which this was a repertory-wide practice can only be speculated upon. Even if repertory companies had desired to show these kinds of plays in sequence, the practical constraints may well have been insuperable. The First Folio compilers, however, had the advantage of being temporally distanced, and they were able to ensure chronological arrangement of the history plays (regardless of the original order of composition or performance). Any critical emphasis on the “interconnectedness” of these plays, therefore, must be understood as deriving from a perception of these plays that was inaugurated by the First Folio. Typically, genres are not created until there is widespread industry adoption of a certain set of conventions (Altman 43). In the context of the early modern theatre, “widespread” would equate to a number of repertories – not just those of the Queen’s and Chamberlain’s Men – treating in an identifiably characteristic way the theme of English history. Since this did not occur, it can be said that the power of Shakespeare’s representations themselves largely

lay latent until organized through an “interpreter’s purposeful act” that occurred with the First Folio.

Implicit within the term “Shakespearean History play” is the suggestion that the genre’s moment of origin lies with the author himself. This, however, ignores important generic precursors. The Chamberlain’s Men, in appropriating features which the Queen’s Men had used to good effect, appear to have recognized something akin to genre affiliation as “a discursive strategy for gaining access to competitors’ pre-sold audiences” (Altman 120). The source of this generic affiliation, the features which the Chamberlain’s Men privileged in their productions, is difficult to determine at this remove. Nevertheless, it is possible to judge by effects, and the Chamberlain’s and later King’s Men would be so successful in pursuing this strategy that ultimately the Queen’s Men would be usurped from the title-pages of their own plays. By 1617, *The Famous Victories of Henry V* would be marketed in quarto as a King’s Men production (McMillin and MacLean 156). Once again, while it is easy to privilege certain characteristics of Shakespeare’s representations in hindsight, it is possible that the reasons for the success of these plays were not so clear to contemporaries. As a result, other companies who wished to ape the success of the Chamberlain’s may have seized upon what now appear to be less obvious features. The Admiral’s Men, for example, paid four pounds for a play titled *Owen Tudor* “at some time between the tenth and eighteenth of January 1600” (LPD). Given the convergence in subject matter, it is reasonable to infer that in doing so the Admiral’s Men were interested in establishing a link between this new play (now lost) and Shakespeare’s *King Henry V*. This is consistent with the logic of the cycle which ascribes greater significance, as Altman explains in the context of Hollywood film, to generating “a pre-sold audience” on the basis of an identifiable “house star, character, or look” (115). The character of interest in this instance was the character of Katherine.

While *King Henry V* ends on the impending marriage between Henry and Katherine, in reality the union was a short-lived one. The widowed Katherine would ultimately marry the Welshman Owen Tudor, and it would be from this couple’s descendants that the historically significant Tudor line would emerge. Audience interest in the figure of Katherine, and a willingness to engage with a romantic subplot centred on her, may have been apparent even before the Chamberlain’s production of *King Henry V*. The Epilogue to *Henry IV, Part 2* had vouched that “our humble author will continue the story, with Sir John in it, and make you merry with fair Katherine of France”. This

projected emphasis on Katherine did not eventuate in the play which Shakespeare brought to the stage as *King Henry V*. The Admiral's Men, with their own *Owen Tudor*, may have identified a commercial opportunity in satisfying the thwarted expectations of the Chamberlain's audience in this regard. Even if the characteristics by which the history genre is now known had been obvious in the 1590s, the decision to eschew them in favour of a sequel which shifted the story's focus to Katherine is entirely consistent with the non-linear nature of the forces of genre formation. This is because, as Altman notes, "genres are permanently in process and . . . multiple contradictory generic configurations regularly exist" (173). Producers, motivated by commercial imperatives, may simply find the lure of "series, cycles, remakes and sequels" more compelling than any broad generic allegiance (Altman 115). Consequently, other companies may have chosen to imitate what now appear as less defining features of these plays. Although aesthetic considerations would later assume prominence, in the 1590s the significance of these plays by the Chamberlain's may have been more manifest in the opportunities they presented other companies for just this kind of appropriation.

### **The Histories category: a fresh generic claim**

Given that, as the work of these scholars proves, the category of Histories was by no means inevitable, the motivation for the compilers' decision must have been compelling. It cannot be forgotten that, as Holderness notes, "[v]irtually all of the plays designated as 'histories' in the Folio contents page were not so called on their initial publication" (4). The creation of this category therefore entailed a series of deliberate manoeuvres. The chronological arrangement of these plays within the First Folio presents a historical narrative which begins with *King John* and proceeds to *King Henry VIII*. This arrangement, however, belies the order of their composition and the order in which they first appeared in public theatres. Frederic Jameson observes that genres are "institutions or social contracts between a writer and a *specific public*" (*Political* 106). By 1623, this public was no longer in existence and, in any case, many of the internal cues that may have guided an audience of the 1590s in their apprehension of these plays would have lost their currency. With the exception of *Henry VIII*, these plays had all been written during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and were expressions – if not uniformly, then at least to various degrees – of Tudor ideology. But Elizabeth had died in 1603, and a Scottish king with a new set of ideological imperatives had taken her place

on the English throne. While it is certainly true that the plays continued to be performed, the very frame through which these works had originally been perceived – a particular repertory moment within the institution of the theatre – was no longer in existence. The compilers of the First Folio, operating within a different institution – the world of print publication – were sensitive to the opportunities and constraints that this different medium presented. This is significant because, as Frow notes, “[t]he imputations or guesses . . . [made] about the appropriate and relevant conventions to apply . . . are grounded in the institutions in which genre has its social being” (*Genre* 102-3). In 1623, the imputations or guesses made by those coming to these plays would no longer have been guided by a set of repertory conditions that had existed in the 1590s. Instead the institution of print, and the paratextual apparatus afforded by the folio format in particular, were to provide a new set of cues.

### **The “Histories” as Ideology**

It has been observed that “the form and structure of any literary genre is socially engendered – since [the] very ideas of a happy or unhappy ending will be moulded by ideology” (Cockcroft 140). In addition, and in a related way, I argue that the sequencing of these ten plays within the category of History itself fulfilled an ideological function for those readers coming to the plays in print. If the plays weren’t written, as Tillyard once claimed, as a form of propaganda for the Elizabethan state – a way of instantiating what he famously called “The Tudor Myth” – it can at least be conceded that their arrangement within the First Folio contributed to their being read in this way. While there is little evidence of the plays having been performed sequentially in the repertory, their chronological arrangement within the First Folio has made the plays’ connection to Tudor history appear almost axiomatic. That is, although each individual play can be interpreted according to any number of competing agendas, the overriding effect of their sequencing is to direct the audience’s attention to thematic resonances. When the plays are viewed in this way, the underlying concern with the historical conditions that gave rise to Tudor rule cannot easily be ignored. As James R. Siemon notes, “[t]he Folio order provides patterns of ideology and outcome that can be paralleled in the primary historical sources . . . [but] it is unlikely that Shakespeare anticipated anyone encountering these plays in such order” (*Richard III*, Appendix 1, 442-43). It does not appear to have been in any way accidental on the part of the compilers, however, for the

effect generated by the sequencing is further reiterated through the titles of the plays. In this, the compilers appear to have deliberately capitalized on genre's capacity to arouse different sets of expectations. John Wilders has observed that one of the differences between tragedy and history is that "whereas the death of a tragic hero conveys a sense of an ending, the impression created by a history play is that the life of a nation has neither beginning nor ending" (*The Lost Garden* 6). The different title-pages appended to a play like *Richard III* in both its quarto and Folio incarnations would suggest that those involved in the marketing of this play understood this distinction only too well.

Snyder, in noting the exclusion from the category of those plays about Britain's ancient past (*King Lear*, *Cymbeline*), as well as those plays about Roman history, observes that "a basis in recent national events was felt to define the genre . . . and in making that definitive for their history category, Heminges and Condell imply a particular relationship between these plays and their English readers" (91). In other words, this condition that the plays in the category convey a specific kind of "Englishness" would create a certain set of expectations. The Folio grouping of these plays would in turn invite a way of reading English history. The inclusion of a play like *King Henry VIII* within the category of History is in many ways emblematic of the instrumental nature of "the interpreter's purposeful act" in shaping perceptions of the plays within the First Folio. The play's original title when performed at the Globe in 1613 was "All is True", and this signals what critics today have no trouble accepting – that the genre of Romance is key to this play's orientation towards history. The change in title inaugurated by the Folio compilers is indicative of the self-conscious manipulation to which the plays in the volume were subjected and, particularly in the case of the History category, it is reasonable to assume that this was in part a response to changed social conditions. Readers of the First Folio thus brought new expectations to the genre of History. In 1613, the audience's apprehension of *All is True* is likely to have been informed by the outpouring of public grief which had followed the unexpected death of Prince Henry in 1612. Henry had been the projected hero of the Protestant cause, and this may have prompted a sympathetic hearing of the predictions made at the play's conclusion by Archbishop Cranmer for and beyond Elizabeth's reign. In 1623, however, near the end of James's reign, much of this goodwill towards the Stuarts had dissipated. Instead, veneration for the memory of Elizabeth and a mythologizing of the Tudors can be understood as occurring in chiasmic relation to the

disillusionment felt towards Stuart rule. In another context, Roy Strong has observed that it was not until the 1620s that Elizabeth became the subject of a revival of interest and that this “revival coincided with the decline in popularity of Stuart rule and the outbreak of the Thirty Years War. Elizabeth then became a golden age ruler and the posthumous heroine of the Protestant cause” (164). It is this version of Elizabeth that is instantiated by having *All is True*, renamed *King Henry VIII*, assume a new generic function as the concluding play of the Histories. By way of this arrangement, the nine plays preceding *King Henry VIII* function to reinforce the idea that Elizabeth’s reign represented an apotheosis for the Protestant cause, and for the history of England itself.



My claim in this chapter has been that the compilers’ attention to matters of genre also enabled the processes whereby Shakespeare’s place in the literary canon was achieved. Production, of course, is necessarily forward-looking whereas “criticism and categorization are typically turned towards the past” (Altman 124), and the process whereby the History genre would become associated with the figure of Shakespeare and ultimately inseparable from the Shakespeare canon began with the First Folio. Indeed, the truth of David Duff’s observation that “genre theories will always, at some level, compete with author theories” (Introduction 16), is encapsulated in the title and the title-page to the Folio. In an era when the effect generated by the name “Shakespeare” was not at all comparable to that of today, the Folio was an attempt to foster prestige for the author and his canon. The Martin Droeshout portrait makes these intentions clear for, as Emma Smith observes, “[i]t was unusual in early seventeenth-century publishing to make a portrait of the writer so prominent a feature of the book’s presentation” (*Shakespeare’s First Folio* 227-28). What Jonson states explicitly, that Shakespeare “was not of an age, but for all time”, is reinforced implicitly through the classicism of the Folio’s tripartite arrangement of genres. But whereas Jonson’s claim may have appeared less than self-evident to contemporaries – even later in the Restoration, when Shakespeare had been branded “old Shakespeare”, such a claim may still have induced scepticism – the claim made through the institution of genre implicit within the Catalogue is likely to have gone unremarked. It would, however, have been no less powerful for that. Although my approach to genre differs markedly from Alastair Fowler and his conception of genre as a taxonomy underpinned by biological relations (*Kinds*

42), he is surely right when he contends that, of all the forces of canonization, genre is among the most important.

## **Thesis Conclusion**

This thesis has examined the shift from classical to consumer models of genre that occurred with the rise of the public theatres in Elizabethan and Jacobean London. The accomplishments of England's dramatic artform may have been unique, but the changing social conditions that brought this shift about were also being felt in other countries. For example, the observation has been made that "[f]or the Dutch in the seventeenth century, art functioned as a social cement, reinforcing the shared beliefs and aspirations that helped to write and shape the evolving nation" (Kahr xi). Even for those with little knowledge of art history, it is relatively easy to glean a link between the golden age of Dutch painting and a set of social conditions made possible by the newly formed republic's trading power in the seventeenth century. In a society where the benefits of prosperity were enjoyed by a broad array of people, pictures quickly became commodities. The claim that "all Dutch painting, regardless of subject matter, was a form of portraiture" (Sutton 7) suggests that the differences between the supposed genres were elided by one single use: the need to please patrons and provide representations which showed people something about themselves and their way of life. For the subjects, portraiture was "a way of advancing and verifying social ambitions, of inventing and refining personae" (Sutton 7), and some artists became especially adept at fulfilling these desires, transforming themselves into specialists in what has been called the "seated scholar / gentleman type of portrait" (Sutton 32). Painters who had previously relied upon the support of royal, aristocratic, and religious patrons were now able to depict people who, before the advent of capitalism, had been excluded from representation. The origins of this shift in aesthetic taste were thus to be found in economic causes. Although the means to commission lavish portraits were confined to the rich, the desire for representations could hardly be contained. With an abundance of pictures on the market, even everyday Dutch citizens of modest income were able to purchase pictures featuring representations of people who looked just like themselves and who were engaged in familiar everyday activities.

Like their Dutch counterparts, English people looked to art for representations of themselves. But in England, a country also undergoing the advent of capitalism, it was the theatre which most eloquently gave expression to the effects of new social changes. It was the theatre, and the genres which excited people's expectations, which functioned as a social cement. It could also be said that, in a way comparable to the Dutch

experience with a different artform, the drama of the playhouses was making the art of representation more accessible to those for whom it had previously been denied. If a portrait in oil was out of the question for most of those who attended the London theatres, there was still a desire for representation. Playgoers, in other words, brought to the theatre a desire to see themselves and their world represented, and this is why the work performed by genre was so crucial. Genres, and the expectations they aroused, were integral to the success of the playgoers' encounters with the public stage. Just like paintings, plays were commodities and English playgoers were prepared to pay. Typically, English playwrights understood that they were in the business of representation, and the relationship between playwriting and playgoing was continually foregrounded by the commercial nature of the theatres. It was ultimately the playgoers that the newly commercialized industry was relying upon. This, to once again invoke *A Warning for Fair Women*, was the charge which Lady Tragedy levelled at the other genres: they were all the same now and, even those genres with a classical lineage were simply something to be advertised on posts. For all their supposed differences, in a competitive marketplace the genres ultimately performed the same function of providing the variety necessary to ensure that people did not tire of attending the theatre.

But if genres all fulfilled the same commercial purpose, it is unlikely that audiences saw them as being the same. Although the commercial imperative may have been unvarying, the genres were being put to new uses, and they were being transformed. Audiences and readers looked to genres to fulfil purposes specific to their desires. In this regard, plays and playbooks could function as forms of commodity or as aspects of an individual's self-presentation. The promise of social mobility inherent in the emerging market economy found expression through the symbolic associations which purchases enabled. In the theatre and in playbooks, genre was integral to this process. Symbolic association with sought-after groups could be achieved through participation in the right genre communities. Returning once again to Altman's idea that "[g]enres must be understood . . . as language . . . addressed by one party to another, usually for a specific, identifiable purpose" (121), it is helpful to invoke the notion of a contract. Even where the terms are not made explicit, as in the relationship forged between a writer and audience, certain assumptions will be in play. The concept of genre, then, is predicated on shared understanding but the nature of this understanding can change.

Genre designations, when they emerge, are always provisional and subject to revision. Different parties, when they come to the text, will bring different assumptions, and new designations will reflect these changed considerations. In this way, the ascription of genre categories to texts can be productively understood as an act of interpretation. As Peter Childs notes of the act of interpretation, “unless it is merely to repeat the text, [it] must highlight particular aspects for special emphasis while marginalizing others” (77). And if genre is a kind of contract between different parties, it is important to pay attention to the shared assumptions and the kind of world which the contract represents.

The conditions of early modern playing enabled a proliferation of dramatic texts, and the creation of any number of possible fictional worlds through different genres. In effect, the new permanent playhouses ensured the ritualized interactions that would provide early modern Londoners with ways of understanding themselves. Genre, as a typified response to a recurring situation (Miller 28), and as a form of social action, depended on these circumstances. By introducing to the study of early modern genre, the theories of Altman, Frow, and Miller, and such concepts as “memorial function”, “keying”, and “rhetorical action”, I have sought to provide a more nuanced and complex understanding of the multiplicity of ways that genre functioned in the early modern theatre. The importation of genre theory from later periods, for example that of twentieth century Hollywood, enables early modern genre to be represented in a way that better suits its contested and commercial nature. By moving beyond the formal features inherent in a printed play to instead consider genre from the perspective of stakeholders such as critics, playwrights, playing companies, and stationers, this thesis is a bid for recognition of the fact that different reading positions – or the designations that have now passed into critical history – represent pragmatic responses to discrete sets of circumstances and so possess a validity in themselves. In doing so, this thesis provides a way of understanding early modern genre that differs from the emphasis – found in the more taxonomically-oriented approach of a scholar like Fowler – on textual features. This thesis recognizes that Renaissance genres were fit-for-purpose by various practitioners and that the contributions they made continue to have a bearing on how the dramatic texts of this period are perceived. There is no presumption that these practitioners shared the same conceptions of the genres they used in order to fulfil discrete purposes.

I have argued that stakeholders in the early modern period deployed genres in a number of new situations, and that the activities of these stakeholders contributed to the instability but also the productiveness of Renaissance genre. Throughout this period, because of these stakeholders and their activities, consumer models of genre emerged and classical models of genre were modified and sometimes disappeared. At times, the results may have been unpredictable, but they could also be glorious.

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