

Introduction

A life in print: toward a Shakespearean bio-bibliography

On the twentieth of October in 1933, at Stationers' Hall in London, Shakespearean biography and bibliography came together as never before. That evening, Captain William Jaggard, proprietor of the Shakespeare Press on Sheep Street in Stratford-upon-Avon, delivered a lecture on the printing trade in which he told "an unwritten chapter" in the biography of Shakespeare. As the presiding chair noted, Captain Jaggard was uniquely qualified for such a task, due to his profession and place of residence, to his many years of labor in producing the *Shakespeare Bibliography* ("an outstanding work"), and to the fact that the name of Jaggard was "reverenced by all lovers of, and more especially by students of," Shakespeare, because it appeared on the title-page of the First Folio in 1623. A facsimile was on hand to mark the occasion.

The captain began his lecture by lamenting the sorry state of Shakespearean biography, particularly those brief lives that prefaced editions of the works, which for the most part were copied from the first such account, written by Nicholas Rowe and published in 1709. Since these monotonous and scanty biographies left blank a crucial chapter in Shakespeare's life – the decade between his marriage in Stratford and his arrival on the London theater scene – Jaggard proposed an explanation for these vital formative years: that Shakespeare had been, as the title of the lecture claimed, "Once a Printer and Bookman." He offered "five hundred supporting quotations" from the plays and poems that demonstrated Shakespeare's intimate knowledge of printing and publishing. Admittedly, however, this evidence was indirect and inconclusive. Over the years many other suggestions had been made based on references in the works; although most were "too preposterous to merit discussion," Jaggard presented a selection of over one hundred of the professions that had been proposed for Shakespeare, from "Actor" to "Zoologist." The real foundation of his argument was not a matter of quotation and interpretation, though, but a matter of bibliography. Shakespeare's

Stratford contemporary Richard Field became a prosperous printer in London, and so without a doubt once the aspiring poet arrived in the city “he was assured of food and shelter with Dick Field, until work could be found.”¹ In Field’s shop, Shakespeare (“poor” and “desperately hard up”) would gain access to the books that nurtured his growth and development, including a crucial source for his plays, Plutarch’s *Lives*, which Field himself had printed. Jaggard further deduced that Field helped Shakespeare secure employment as a proofreader in the shop of Henry Denham, who had just started work on another essential book, Holinshed’s *Chronicles*. There he would also befriend Denham’s young apprentice: the namesake (and perhaps the ancestor) of the lecturer, William Jaggard, who was the “saviour and sponsor of all the known surviving manuscripts of Shakespeare in 1623.”² Jaggard thus neatly tied together all the narrative strands of Shakespeare’s life and works, from Stratford to London and back again, from inspiration and composition to publication and preservation. In doing so, he claimed the authority of Shakespeare’s printers – and of Shakespeare himself. Indeed, for Caroline Spurgeon, who once met this “present-day Stratfordian” in his bookshop, he seemed to be a “voice from the dead,” speaking not only for his ancestor but also for his celebrated townsman.³ Biography and bibliography meet in an uncanny conjunction.

Captain Jaggard’s foray into the field of Shakespearean biography that evening was a thoroughly researched argument, and may also have been a self-reflexive act of wish fulfillment. But his eccentric exercise differs only in degree, rather than in kind, from the methods and objectives of mainstream biographical and bibliographical scholarship. First, a problem that previous scholarship has failed to solve is identified: a gap in the evidentiary record at an important point in Shakespeare’s life. Next, the available

¹ Jaggard, *Printer and Bookman*, 3. Although Jaggard does not mention it here, Field served as the printer for *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*; see Chapter 1.

² Jaggard, *Printer and Bookman*, 4. Jaggard dedicated his *Shakespeare Bibliography* to the “Elizabethan author, printer, and publisher, to whom the world owes more than it deems for the safe preservation of an unparalleled literary heritage.” The captain was fond of claiming that he was descended from his early modern counterpart, though he did not mention it in the *Bibliography* or during his Stationers’ Hall lecture.

³ Spurgeon, *Shakespeare’s Imagery*, 96–8. Spurgeon recalled an encounter with the “descendant of William Jaggard” in which the captain described the swirling water of the Avon as observed from Clopton Bridge: “Captain Jaggard, as he said this, was at the further end of his shop . . . and his voice, coming thus somewhat muffled from the distance, gave me the most curious thrill and start, as if it were a voice from the dead. For here was a present-day Stratfordian describing to me in prose, in minute detail, exactly what a Stratford man had thus set down in verse nearly three hundred and fifty years ago.” Spurgeon then quotes a stanza from *Lucrece*.

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evidence is reevaluated and reexamined, in part by redefining what can be considered as evidence. A combination of critical (interpretive) and historical (investigative) methods are employed: a careful reading of the plays and poems reveals the source materials they incorporate, as well as patterns of imagery; a collection of documentary records and bibliographical facts is assembled and organized. A compelling narrative is produced, one that offers a plausible explanation for the initial problem – an explanation that stands on the evidence, and is also satisfactory to the scholar.

The underlying motivation of Shakespearean biography is to understand the connections between the life and the works. The assumption is that the works can be explained through the life, using bibliography to answer several central questions: what were Shakespeare's influences, how did he engage with them, and how did Shakespeare come by his books? In turn, the life is derived from the works, as quotations from the plays and poems are construed as unconscious revelations – evidence of Shakespeare's professional knowledge that is unmistakable, yet only visible to the discerning scholar. What would otherwise be biographical speculation or critical interpretation is given the weight of bibliographical fact. The narrative is sanctioned not only by scholarly authority, but also by Shakespeare himself.

Captain Jaggard was a bookseller and bibliographer from Stratford who told a story in which printers and booksellers made Shakespeare, a story about how books and the book trade shaped his life and afterlife. Jaggard's lecture demonstrates both the possibilities and the problems of merging biography and bibliography. He is the descendant who begets both his forefathers and his objects of study in the image of his own profession. My objective is not to condemn the captain – who seems to have been aware of the more speculative elements in his argument – but rather to suggest that the motives and methodologies evident in his lecture are shared by certain strands of contemporary Shakespeare scholarship.

Selling Shakespeare tells a new story about Shakespeare's life and career *in print*, a story centered not on the man or writer himself, but on the reputation and authorial personae created, bought, and sold by the early modern book trade. The interests and investments of publishers and booksellers have defined our ideas of the Shakespearean. Because they first made Shakespeare's life in print, attending to these interests demonstrates how multiple agencies created multiple versions of Shakespearean authorship – and how one of those versions surpassed the rest. Instead of asking only what the book trade did for Shakespeare, I ask what Shakespeare did for the members of the book trade.

What this book offers is a new kind – or, rather, the recovery and extension of a different kind – of biographical investigation and historicist criticism, one based not on external life documents, nor on the texts of Shakespeare’s works, but on the *books* that were printed, published, sold, circulated, collected, and catalogued under his name. Here biography and bibliography intersect, both methodologically and morphologically, as I recuperate the practice of “bio-bibliography,” a term used to describe the listing of an author’s works accompanied by a brief description of the life.⁴ This term encapsulates both the practice and the evidentiary basis of the first efforts to outline Shakespeare’s life and career as a playwright in the seventeenth century. The compilers of these lives were very much aware of the (printed) sources they used, and thus provide an alternative to the established history of Shakespearean biography, which asserts that modern conceptions of Shakespeare’s career began in the eighteenth century, with the rise of a reliance on “authentic” archival methods. While the early compilers did repeat apocryphal stories that are now discredited, they also constructed Shakespeare’s career according to the existence – and the value – of the plays attributed to him in print. In these accounts, Shakespeare’s life depended on his afterlife in print.

Selling Shakespeare provides a new history of Shakespeare’s career, but also an alternative history of dramatic authorship and criticism. Shakespeare’s authorial reputation was collaboratively produced by the individual and institutional investments of the early modern book trade. Established by intersecting material, textual, and interpretive networks, these coexisting and competing authorial personae become visible in my examination of four pivotal episodes in Shakespeare’s life in print: the debut of his narrative poems, the appearance of a series of best-selling plays, the publication of collected editions of his works, and the cataloguing of those works. My aim is to reveal how our ideas of Shakespearean authorship, and the genre of early modern drama as we know it, came into being as commercial, conceptual, and critical categories. The book trade constructed and, over time, transformed Shakespeare’s reputation, a process contingent upon the specific commercial systems in which his works existed. That reputation was created, and repeatedly recreated, by the stationers who put Shakespeare up for sale, and by the ways customers and readers responded to and used the books branded with his name. The definition and the value of that brand shifted over the seventeenth century, so that by the eighteenth century, Shakespeare’s identity as a

⁴ See *OED*, s.v. “bio-” which includes a brief entry for “bio-bibliography.”

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poet had effectively been subsumed by his identity as a playwright. While Shakespeare was revived and reshaped in the theater, the book trade produced and preserved his life in print, making Shakespeare and printed drama available to be placed at the center of the English literary canon.

The method I have adopted could also be called “biblio-biography”: it is a life of Shakespeare based on the biography of his books, and of the stationers who produced those books.⁵ These life stories tell us a great deal about Shakespeare’s career as an author, but they have been lost or subordinated to scholarly interest in Shakespeare’s purportedly authorial attitudes and desires. I am uninterested in his desires, which are in any case unknowable, and which were – and are – unnecessary to authorize his life in print and the critical narratives we construct about that life.

The extant imprints of Richard Field and the records of William Jaggard’s apprenticeship are the stock-in-trade of editors, bibliographers, and book historians, constituting the evidence that scholars interpret and incorporate into coherent (if not ultimately conclusive) narratives about Shakespeare’s career in print. Field and Jaggard – featured subjects of Chapters 1 and 3, respectively – provide a possible (if not quite probable or demonstrable) basis upon which to explain certain events in the life and career of Shakespeare and, further, to build claims for the author’s interest in publication.⁶ But to consider these potential relationships as a historical reality and, further, to use the stationers as guarantors of Shakespeare’s authorial status, is to fall prey to what Leeds Barroll identified as a tendency to canonize certain accounts of Shakespeare’s career by the “privileging of supposed events as basic facts.” Instead, Barroll stressed the “multiple interpretive possibilities” of the evidence from which we construct historical narratives – possibilities that are not self-evident, and are inevitably influenced by our own critical preoccupations.⁷ In the first iteration of this argument, Barroll was primarily concerned with evaluating methodological problems within New Historicism, but in the revised and expanded version he began with a critique of what he termed the “difficult art” of Shakespearean biography and the requisite, yet delicate, task of reaching back in time through the surviving documents and records to “some

⁵ Emma Smith uses this term in her biography of the First Folio, which aims to “reconstruct one particular book as a specimen of life-writing” (*Shakespeare’s First Folio*). On the connections between biography and bibliography, see Lesser, *Hamlet After QT*, esp. 58–71.

⁶ “Possible,” “probable,” and “demonstrable” are the terms used by Bowers to describe the “three orders of certainty” in bibliographical scholarship in *Bibliography and Textual Criticism*.

⁷ Barroll, “Privileged Biographies,” 7.

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notion of the reality of the historical personage.”⁸ Shakespearean biography and bibliography are both thriving scholarly enterprises, and so this is a timely moment to reassess the ways in which desires for and assumptions about the “historical personage” both authorize and impinge on our own critical practices.

There has been a recent return to and reclamation of Shakespeare as an individual authorial agent who demands to be the central object of our attention. (I would call this a “biographical turn” in Shakespeare studies, but that would presume that biographical concerns ever went away.) Prominent critical narratives adduce bibliographical evidence that allows for, and seems to sanction, a biographical approach. A connection to a stationer like Field enables scholars to rescue Shakespeare from a “poor” and “desperately hard up” state within *our* field, which had allowed for the dispersal of his authority by poststructuralist theory (which reduced the author to a function) and then by materialist studies of collaborative textual and theatrical production. Although employing the techniques of book history and bibliography, which seem to promise a measure of objectivity, much of this recent revisionist work continues to be motivated by an essentially biographical interest in the individual.

Biographies of Shakespeare are always abundant, although a renewed attention to the problems of biography has accompanied the anniversaries of his birth (450th) and death (400th).⁹ Andrew Hadfield (a biographer himself) has expressed concern that “reproducing the same narratives of the same lives . . . has the effect of anchoring and circumscribing the parameters of what we know and think. Biographies are only valuable if we know why we read them and how we plan to use the knowledge they provide.”¹⁰ (The same could be said about bibliographical narratives, as well.) The end of literary biography has also been proclaimed. It has been critiqued as an exhausted form, and as unnecessary for historicism, criticism, and even authorship itself.¹¹ If we can never be certain about the crucial facts of Shakespeare’s life – and, by extension, about the connections between the life and the works – then perhaps we do not need Shakespeare biographies at all. Or perhaps we need to understand why and how biography became a problem – how we arrived at our current evidentiary standards for an account of “the life,” and how those standards

⁸ Barroll, “Privileged Biographies,” 3. For the earlier version, see Barroll, “New History.”

⁹ In 2014 the Folger Shakespeare Library hosted an NEH Collaborative Research conference on “Shakespeare and the Problem of Biography.”

¹⁰ Hadfield, “Why Does Literary Biography Matter?,” 376.

¹¹ See Cummings, “Last Words,” 489–90.

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relate to the ostensibly more objective criteria of bibliography. Or perhaps what we need is a new kind of biography: a life in print.

“the better understanding his Book”

The history of Shakespearean biography is a history of failure. Thomas Heywood, who claimed to have been aware of Shakespeare’s attitude toward authorship and the book trade (as detailed in Chapter 3), planned an ambitious “liues of all the Poets Moderne and Forreigne,” which was intermittently mentioned over the final three decades of his life.¹² Unfortunately, Heywood appears never to have completed it – his biographical energies were otherwise employed¹³ – thus depriving posterity of a contemporary account of Shakespeare. It is just as well for Heywood that he did not publish it, for every generation has deemed previous lives of Shakespeare to be inadequate and impoverished, a demonstration of the changing attitudes toward and definitions of biography. Shakespeare’s contemporaries and successors in the seventeenth century have been subjected to the harshest criticism; thus the tradition of proper Shakespearean biography is usually dated to the early eighteenth century.

Captain Jaggard rightly complained that editions of the works continued to reproduce the same basic outline of Shakespeare’s life that Nicholas Rowe had compiled over two centuries earlier. Rowe is often identified as the first editor *and* the first biographer of Shakespeare, however idiosyncratic or inadequate his efforts have since been judged. Rowe was hired by the Tonson publishing house to edit *The Works of Mr. William Shakespear* (1709), which was advertised as “Revis’d and Corrected, with an Account of the Life and Writings of the Author.” The 1709 *Works* was the first multivolume edition of Shakespeare’s plays, and Rowe’s “Account” was the first prefatory life of Shakespeare. This may have been an innovation in Shakespearean biography, but it was nothing new for the book trade or for

¹² Heywood, *Gynaikeion: or, Nine Bookes of Various History Concerninge Women* (1624), Q3^v. In a marginal note in *The Schollers Medley* (1614), Richard Brathwait noted that “my Iudicious friend Maister *Tho. Heywood*, hath taken in hand (by his great industry) to make a Generall (though Summary) description of all the Poets liues” (E4^r). Heywood himself mentioned it again in 1635: “hereafter (I hope) by Gods assistance, to commit to the publick view . . . the Liues of all the Poets, Forreine and Moderne, from the first before *Homer*, to the *Novissimi* and last, of what Nation or Language soeuer; so farre as any Historie or Chronologie will giue me warrant” (*The Hierarchie of the blessed Angells*, X3^r).

¹³ For example, *The VVonder of This Age* (1635), about a man who lived to be 152 years old; and *The Phoenix of these late times* (1637), an account of a man “*who lived at his house in Grub-street forty foure yeares,*” but who was “never seene by any.”

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the Tonson house, which routinely attached brief lives of the author to editions of their collected works, in part because customers had come to expect them.¹⁴

Rowe began his task skeptically and apologetically: while it is a matter of respect to those “Excellent Men” whom “Wit and Learning have made Famous” to provide “some Account of themselves, as well as their Works,” this often leads to a misguided sense of curiosity on the part of readers, for “how fond do we see some People of discovering any little Personal Story,” or “the common Accidents of their Lives,” down to “the very Cloaths he wears.” Rowe thus proceeds to justify his own such account, for in the case of “Men of Letters, the knowledge of an Author may sometimes conduce to the better understanding his Book.”¹⁵ The “Account” includes anecdotal reports of Shakespeare’s life and death, his education, his relationships, and his reputation, and a fair amount of what might be called literary gossip. Rowe largely disclaims his role as a biographer, though, relying (as he states) on the research (such as it was) of the actor Thomas Betterton, who made a “Journey into *Warwickshire*, on purpose to gather up what Remains he could.”¹⁶ As an editor, Rowe’s task was to attend to the text – and that is where he found his Shakespeare. Most of the “Account” consists of critical remarks on the plays and an enumeration of the “Beauties” found therein, which is a “much larger, as well as a more delightful Field.”¹⁷ The biography is created by the desire to better understand Shakespeare’s “Book” – which for Rowe simply meant the most recent folio edition (1685) that he used as copy-text, and which thus simply served as the medium for the texts of the plays.¹⁸ The life comes into being through and is constituted by the works.

Versions of Rowe’s “Account” were reprinted in successive editions of the collected works throughout the eighteenth century, mostly because of the control the Tonsons exerted over the copyright to Shakespeare.¹⁹ In 1790, Edmond Malone likewise reprinted it – but he attached copious footnotes that condemned and corrected the inaccuracies he found in the “meagre and imperfect” account left by Rowe.²⁰ More than anyone, it was

¹⁴ See Kewes, “Shakespeare’s Lives,” 61, where she states that “an author’s life had become an essential element and a strong selling point of collected works.” See also Hamm, “Tonson House Style.” Marino examines the connections between the Tonson publishing house, the practice of editing, and the newly instituted regime of intellectual property (*Owning*, 1–12).

¹⁵ Rowe, “Account,” iii. ¹⁶ Rowe, “Account,” xxxiv. ¹⁷ Rowe, “Account,” xvi.

¹⁸ Holland, “Introduction,” x–xvii.

¹⁹ In Schoenbaum’s discussion of what he dubs the “tribe of Nicholas,” he notes that most editions reprinted Alexander Pope’s adapted version of Rowe’s “Account,” first published in 1725 (*Shakespeare’s Lives*, rev. edn., 90–6).

²⁰ *Plays and Poems* (1790), I:lxiii.

Malone who established the methodology and the narrative trajectory of Shakespearean biography; he has been given the credit (and the blame) for establishing a documentary foundation for the study of Shakespeare’s life and works.²¹ (Although for contemporary readers Rowe’s “Account” remained more accessible, and thus more immediately influential, than Malone’s, since his footnotes, however abundant, were “hardly a typographically prominent site.”²²) Malone claimed that “it would not have been difficult” to form a new life of Shakespeare, since he had collected a wealth of new information, based on new forms of evidence, and he stated his ambition to “weave the whole into one uniform and connected narrative.”²³ Malone based his research on what he called “original” and “authentic” documents²⁴ rather than the hearsay and speculation recorded by Rowe. Malone began his own life of Shakespeare with an extensive list of near-contemporaries who could have preserved crucial biographical information, the loss of which “cannot be contemplated without astonishment.”²⁵ Nevertheless he remained undeterred, as he diligently sought out documentary evidence. As an editor, Malone depended on printed books to collate and elucidate Shakespeare’s texts; as a biographer he sought out verifiable records: handwritten documents that registered the life (and death) of his immediate family, or his various business, legal, and theatrical pursuits.²⁶ Malone’s biography remained unfinished at his death; it was posthumously published under the supervision of James Boswell in 1821. His “uniform and connected narrative” was never produced; Boswell simply inserted Malone’s “An Attempt to Ascertain the Order in which the Plays attributed to Shakspeare were Written” in place of a narrative account of his crucial active years in London.²⁷ Rather than deriving the life from the works, Malone attempted to discover, or create, an external life that could explain, organize, and authorize the works – even if the chronology of those works actually constituted the life. Although Malone did his share of speculation, his claim (and construction of) the authenticity of archival scholarship would have profound consequences.

²¹ See De Grazia, *Shakespeare Verbatim*. ²² Kewes, “Shakespeare’s Lives,” 75.

²³ Malone, *Plays and Poems* (1790), I:lxiii.

²⁴ De Grazia, *Verbatim*, 49–94. De Grazia has emphasized Malone’s focus on “dated materials” that could be used to establish a chronology of the life and works (“Timeline,” 391).

²⁵ Malone, “Life,” II.

²⁶ For a list of the extant records, see Thomas, *Public Records*; Bearman, *Stratford Records*; and Orlin, “Anne by Indirection.”

²⁷ De Grazia, “Timeline,” 396–7.

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Malone was a hero to his twentieth-century counterpart, Samuel Schoenbaum, the admirable and acerbic chronicler of Shakespearean biography. Schoenbaum likewise bemoaned the “vague generalities” and “largely desultory endeavours” of the earliest biographical notices.²⁸ His monumental survey charted a course in which “the protagonist” of Shakespearean biography gradually emerged “from the mists of ignorance and misconception” – a task that, however fraught with ideological and archival determinism, he accomplished with substance, spirit, and style.²⁹ Schoenbaum prized biographies written according to modern historical standards of accuracy and authenticity, which claim a documentary guarantee for the narrative presented. The aim of his own biography was to avoid the mistakes and eccentricities of some of his predecessors, and instead to “present a straightforward account of Shakespeare’s life,” combined with “facsimiles, faithfully reproduced, of the documents and records which comprise the biographer’s materials.” He eschews speculation based on the works, instead rhapsodizing over the “sense of wonder” he feels “in the presence of these remembrances of times past.”³⁰ In making facsimiles of these “remembrances” accessible, he allowed readers to benefit not only from a straightforward scholarly account, but also to experience a part of that “sense of wonder” for themselves.³¹ And yet in the very same year in which his *Documentary Life* appeared, the text of a lecture given by Schoenbaum was published in which he identified the failures, and indicted the current disciplinary neglect, of biography. Echoing an earlier defensive appraisal of analytical bibliography, Schoenbaum asked why the “armies of scholarship clash not over troth-plight and second-best bed, but over Q1 and Q2, Compositor A and Compositor B. What has happened?”³² For Schoenbaum this was a crisis of faith: the faith that had “sustained an apostolic succession of scholars” from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, from Malone to E. K. Chambers (both of whom had failed to write a complete life history). And so, despite Schoenbaum’s own

²⁸ *Shakespeare’s Lives*, rev. edn., 84, 86. ²⁹ *Shakespeare’s Lives*, rev. edn., x.

³⁰ *Documentary Life*, xii. In the companion volume, Schoenbaum writes of the many “pilgrimages” he made to archival repositories in order to ensure the accuracy of the facsimiles (*Records and Images*, xii).

³¹ Two years after the publication of the lavish, large-format *Documentary Life*, Schoenbaum responded to the call for a “cheaper and more convenient edition” with his *Compact Documentary Life* (1977), which was reprinted numerous times, and reissued in a revised edition in 1987.

³² “Problem of Biography,” 54. He had concluded the preface to the first edition of *Shakespeare’s Lives* (1970) by affirming his “passionate interest in the lives and achievements of people,” as opposed to most “of the really significant work on Shakespeare in this century,” which has been “impersonal and technical – I am thinking particularly of the achievements in analytical bibliography which have revolutionized our understanding of Shakespeare’s text” (xii).

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