

BEAUMONT AND/OR FLETCHER:
COLLABORATION AND THE
INTERPRETATION OF RENAISSANCE
DRAMA*

JEFFREY A. MASTEN**

It were . . . wisdome it selfe, to read all Authors, as *Anonymo's*,
looking on the Sence, not *Names* of Books¹

“‘What does it matter who is speaking,’ someone said, ‘what does it matter who is speaking.’”² It is perhaps writing against the grain of this Essay to begin by quoting Foucault’s quotation of Beckett in his essay *What Is an Author?*, elaborately framed by the technologies keeping in place the Author whom Foucault critiques—the quotation marks, the citation. To follow this genealogy of quotation back further is to reach Beckett’s ambivalent “someone,” though even here I would want to note the attribution of these words to an authorial presence. *Someone*, like *anonymous*, denotes the insistence of the authorship question; though it does not identify, it marks a space for identity, a need to know “who is speaking.”

The historicity of that need is registered in the word *anonymous*, which supports Foucault’s contention that the author has a particular point of emergence as a cultural fiction. *Anonymous* does not take on its recognizably modern sense in English (“bearing no author’s name; of unknown or unavowed authorship”) until the late seventeenth century; earlier, around 1600, the word signifies “a person whose name is not given, or is unknown,” but does not connect persons with texts.³ Beginning

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** B.A., 1986, Denison University; A.M., 1987, Ph.D. 1991, University of Pennsylvania. Professor Masten is currently Assistant Professor of English and American Literature and Language at Harvard University.

¹ RICHARD WHITLOCK, *ZOOTOMIA, OR OBSERVATIONS ON THE PRESENT MANNERS OF THE ENGLISH: BRIEFLY ANATOMIZING THE LIVING BY THE DEAD* 208 (London, Tho. Roycroft & Humphrey Moseley 1654) (emphasis added).

² MICHEL FOUCAULT, *What Is an Author?*, in *THE FOUCAULT READER* 101 (Paul Rabinow ed., 1984).

³ 1 THE OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY 493 (2d ed. 1989) [hereinafter OED]. A survey of seventeenth-century reference materials shows that, even in this limited meaning, *anonymous* rarely appeared in hard-word-lists and translation dictionaries.

An exception, the scholarly *RIDERS DICTIONARIE* (Oxford, 3d. ed. 1612), translates the English *Namelesse* into the Latin *Anonymus*, but, significantly, not vice-versa—a sug-

around 1676, however, *anonymous* begins to signal the author-ization of a text, the importance of someone, anyone, speaking.⁴ The author's emergence is marked by the notice of its absence.

My *its* here remarks on the author's singularity, for as modern usage makes clear, *anonymous* emerges with the author as a singular entity; *anonymity*, the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* notes, is a property of "an author or his writings."⁵ There is a moment in history, in other words, when it becomes important to know not only that someone is speaking, but also that some *one* is speaking. Unlike the *OED*, my *its* also avoids the normative seventeenth-century gendering of authorship; though this Essay addresses this issue only obliquely, it will suggest the inextricability of the question of authorship from patriarchy's obsession with knowing the identity of the father.⁶

The singular author and its twin, anonymous, are in a sense my subject in this essay, but I am most interested in what preceded their "birth." There was, as my epigraph from 1654 suggests, a period of transition in early modern European history—a time when both reading "Names" and reading "Sence" existed as interpretive methodologies—preceded by a time when interpretation proceeded without an author. My project here is thus the genealogist's: to trace back beyond the impasse of Beckett's pronoun the seemingly natural connection between the author and the text—the some/one and the speaking—in order to demonstrate that interpretation has not always proceeded on the basis of that relation (and thus need not always). Barthes famously noted the author's "death," and what I hope to elaborate here is the author's "birth." I hesitate over these metaphors de-

gestion that the word had not gained currency as an English word beyond a scholarly, latinate context. This is the case as late as 1677, in COLES, A DICTIONARY, ENGLISH-LATIN, AND LATIN-ENGLISH (London, John Richardson et al. eds., 1677). In MINSHEU, DUCTOR IN LINGUAS, THE GVIDE INTO TONGVES (London, Iohn Browne ed., 1617), the Latin *Anonymus* is translated into English as "Vnnamed." In none of the other "dictionaries" in which it appears does the word connect persons with texts; the unanimous gloss is simply "nameless."

⁴ *OED*, *supra* note 3, at 493. For methodological reasons (the *OED*'s limited quotation-sources) as well as theoretical reasons (the notion of word "coinage" is readily historicized within a capitalist context), we must read *OED*'s dates not as solid markers of a word's invention or origin but, more flexibly, as an indication of meanings in circulation at any given time. The related forms of *anonymous* (*anonymity*, *anonymously*, *anonymousness*) emerge even later, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

⁵ *Id.* (emphasis added).

⁶ In the project from which this work derives, I explore the intersection of discourses of writing, sexuality, and reproduction in Renaissance drama and its early printed apparatus. See Jeffrey A. Masten, *Textual Reproduction: Collaboration, Gender, and Authorship in Renaissance Drama* (1991) (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania). On the issue of paternity, see MARJORIE GARBER, *SHAKESPEARE'S GHOST WRITERS: LITERATURE AS UNCANNY CAUSALITY* (1987).

liberately, for (as I think Barthes would appreciate) “birth” naturalizes and makes inevitable an event—or rather, set of events—that were, as I will suggest, contingent and by no means biological, transcultural, or even uniformly-occurring across discourses and genres within a given culture. To do this, I want to consider a set of texts that consistently defy our (modern) sense of both authorship and anonymity, texts generated in the predominantly collaborative dramatic practice of early modern England. Most of these texts began as productions in the theatre, where their writers were not known, and many of them first appeared in print without ascription of authorship (or anonymity); they are thus “pre-anonymous”—that is, “anonymous” only in a sense that existed before the word itself emerged with the author to describe their condition. *Anonymous*, in other words, only assumes its textual associations as a marking of difference from a new concept of authorship. These texts also defy modern anonymity in another crucial way, for their authorlessness is plural and collaborative.⁷

Collaborative dramatic texts from this period thus strikingly denaturalize the author-text-reader continuum assumed in later methodologies of interpretation. Located both at a historical moment prior to the emergence of the author in its modern form and as a mode of textual production that distances the writer(s) from the interpreting audience, dramatic collaboration disperses the authorial voice (or rather, our historically subsequent notion of the authorial voice); it instead exhibits the different configuration of authorities controlling texts and (as we shall see) constraining their interpretation. In such a context, interpretation (and here I mean both our methods for interpretation and our sense of what an interpretation is) can be radically different.

In a scholarly field dominated by the singular figure of Shakespeare, it is easily forgotten that collaboration was the Renaissance English theatre’s dominant mode of textual production. In his ground-breaking study of the profession of dramatist from 1590-1642, Gerald Eades Bentley notes that nearly two-thirds of the plays mentioned in Henslowe’s papers reflect the participation of more than one writer. Furthermore, of all the plays writ-

⁷ For a characterization of anonymity related but alternative to the one I have sketched above, see Virginia Woolf, *ANON.*, 25 *TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE* 382-98 (1975) (posthumously published). Although Woolf too identifies a shift in English culture from nameless to named texts, her construal romanticizes *Anon* as a free and nameless individual; the central strategy of the essay is in some sense to identify and individualize the writer she identifies as nameless. In Woolf’s scheme, the named author *replaces* (rather than emerges with) *Anon*.

ten by professional dramatists in the period, “as many as half . . . incorporated the writing . . . of more than one man.” Printed title-page statements of singular authorship “tended . . . to simplify the actual circumstances of composition” when compared with other records.⁸ There is also ample evidence of the frequent revision of play-texts, itself a diachronic form of collaboration. It was common practice for the professional writers attached to a given theatrical company to compose new prologues, epilogues, songs, characters, and scenes for revivals of plays in which they did not originally have a hand—*Doctor Faustus* and *Sir Thomas More* are famous examples. Thus “almost any play first printed more than ten years after composition and . . . kept in active repertory by the company which owned it is most likely to contain later revisions by the author or, in many cases, by another playwright.”⁹

In a broader sense, theatrical production was itself a sustained collaboration, “the joint accomplishment of dramatists, actors, musicians, costumers, prompters (who made alterations in the original manuscript) and . . . managers.”¹⁰ That is, the construction of meaning by a theatrical company was polyvocal—often beginning with a collaborative manuscript, which was then revised, cut, rearranged, and augmented by prompters, copyists, and other writers, elaborated and improvised by actors in performance, accompanied by music and songs that may or may not have originated in a completely different context.¹¹ Furthermore, the larger theatrical enterprise, situated in the marketplace, was the highly lucrative, capitalist collaboration of a “company” of “sharers,” in commerce with their audience—in Jean-Christophe Agnew’s useful phrase, “a joint venture of limited liability.”¹² Plays’ prologues and epilogues, those liminal

⁸ GERALD EADES BENTLEY, *THE PROFESSION OF DRAMATIST IN SHAKESPEARE’S TIME 1590-1642*, at 199 (1971).

⁹ *Id.* at 263. Recent considerations of revised texts in the Shakespeare canon have effectively dissolved the notion of the single text, but they insist anachronistically upon the notion of a singular revising authorial consciousness. See *THE DIVISION OF THE KINGDOMS: SHAKESPEARE’S TWO VERSIONS OF King Lear* (Gary Taylor & Michael Warren eds., 1983). But see SCOTT McMILLIN, *THE ELIZABETHAN THEATRE AND The Book of Sir Thomas More 153-59* (1987) (author usefully explores revision as a deconstruction of authorial individuality in the *Sir Thomas More* manuscript).

¹⁰ BENTLEY, *supra* note 8, at 198. See also Stephen Orgel, *What is a Text?*, in *STAGING THE RENAISSANCE* (David Scott Kastan & Peter Stallybrass eds., 1991) (elaborating on Bentley).

¹¹ This is to say nothing of the manifold collaborations that generated a play-text when/if it was eventually printed.

¹² JEAN-CHRISTOPHE AGNEW, *WORLDS APART: THE MARKET AND THE THEATER IN AN-GLO-AMERICAN THOUGHT, 1550-1750*, at 111 (1986). Compare Woolf, *supra* note 7, at 395 (stating that “the play was a common product, written by one hand, but so moulded in

textual spaces between the play and the playhouse, stage the intersections of acting company and audience in the language of commerce; the prologue to *Romeo and Iuliet* (1597) emphasizes this trans/action when it speaks of “the two howres traffique of our Stage.”¹³ Human hands—hands that applaud, but also the hands that pay to see the play, the hand-shaking that seals the bargain, the collaborating hands of exchange and commerce—make repeated appearance in this framing material: “Do but you hold out/Your helping hands,” the prologue to *The Two Noble Kinsmen* asks, “and we shall . . . something doe to save us.”¹⁴

Including theatrical production in a discussion of “collaboration” may risk an excessive broadening of the term, but it is important to suggest (as I think the play-texts themselves do) the inseparability of the textual and theatrical production of meaning in a context that did not carefully insulate the writing of scripts from the acting of plays. (Actors William Shakespeare and William Rowley can serve as figures for this convergence.) The commonplace editorial concern over a play’s “date of composition,” which assumes a relatively limited amount of time during which a text was fully composed and after which it was merely transmitted and corrupted, is obviously problematic in this broader understanding of collaboration. What does “composition” include in such a context? (Re)writing? Copying? Staging? The addition of theatrical gestures? Typesetting (which, after all, is called “composing”)? When is [the writing, staging, printing of] a text complete?

Censorship—in Annabel Patterson’s extended sense, an activity that both silences discourses and generates others¹⁵—is a further participant in the production of theatrical meaning in this period. To choose two relatively simple examples: In *Sir Thomas More*, the censor writes in the manuscript along with the collaborating writers, making changes and demanding others. The suppression of *A Game at Chess* from the public stage occasioned the proliferation of widely variant printed and manuscript versions of

transition that the author had no sense of property in it. It was in part the work of the audience.”). It is important to notice that (in a way to which I will return below) Woolf insists upon the singlehandedness of textual production in this period, even as she stresses the collaborative role of the audience.

¹³ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, AN EXCELLENT CONCEITED TRAGEDIE OF ROMEO AND IULIET (Q1) (London, Iohn Danter 1597).

¹⁴ JOHN FLETCHER & WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, THE TWO NOBLE KINSMEN (Prologue) (London, Tho. Cotes for Iohn Waterson 1634). For a discussion of the handshake’s emerging contractual significance, see AGNEW, *supra* note 12, at 86-89.

¹⁵ See ANNABEL PATTERSON, CENSORSHIP AND INTERPRETATION: THE CONDITIONS OF WRITING AND READING IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND (1984).

the play.¹⁶

Despite this broad range of figures and forces collaborating in play-texts, later considerations of Renaissance drama have nevertheless worked to construct an authorial univocality. Viewing these texts as literature in the library rather than as working documents in the playhouse, criticism has read them primarily as written communications between writers and readers.¹⁷ Such an approach privileges “writer” and “reader” according to their value in modern literate, literary culture and elides both the prior textual exchange between writers and actors and the oral/aural transaction between actors and audience, the more prominent participants in the initial and most prolific form of these texts’ public/ation. Theatrical practice reserved no place for the writer in performance except as an actor in the company, and these texts were generally made accessible to readers only as an after-thought capitalizing on their theatrical popularity. It is crucial, in other words, to consider the social production of different genres and the ways in which they reach print. *The Faerie Queene* and, say, *Romeo and Iuliet* may both appear to be texts designed for reading (especially as edited for modern consumption); however, the former exhibits the apparatus of both the book and the author, while the latter (in quarto form) presents itself not as a communication between writer and reader (or even as a book, in the modern sense), but rather as a representation/recapitulation of a theatrical experience, a communication between actors and audience—the text “*As it hath been often (with great applause) plaid publicly. . .*”¹⁸ Only by eliding or ignoring the theatrical as a mode of (re)production can these texts can be read from the post-Enlightenment perspective of individual authorship, the now-victorious mode of textual production and the site of Foucault’s critique.

Traditionally, the criticism has viewed collaboration as a mere subset or aberrant kind of individual authorship, the collusion of two unique authors whom subsequent readers could discern and separate out by examining the traces of individuality and personality (including handwriting, spelling, word-choice, imagery, and syntactic formations) left in the collaborative text.¹⁹

¹⁶ See, e.g., T.H. Howard-Hill, *The Author as Scribe or Reviser?: Middleton’s Intentions in A Game at Chess*, 1987 *TRANSACTIONS OF THE SOCIETY FOR TEXTUAL SCHOLARSHIP* 305-18.

¹⁷ See McMILLIN, *supra* note 9, at 15.

¹⁸ SHAKESPEARE, *supra* note 13 (emphasis added).

¹⁹ THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS SUBJECT HEADINGS reflects and perpetuates this paradigm by listing “collaboration” as a sub-heading only under the larger rubric of “authorship.”

The work of Cyrus Hoy, to choose the most prominent and influential example of such studies, attempts to separate out the collaborators in "the Beaumont and Fletcher canon" on the grounds of "linguistic criteria";²⁰ however, there is a repeated conflict in Hoy's project between his post-Enlightenment assumptions about authorship, textual property, and individuality of style, and the evidence of the period texts he analyzes. Hoy wishes "[t]o distinguish any given dramatist's share in a play of dual or doubtful authorship" by applying a "body of criteria which, derived from the unaided plays of the dramatist in question, will serve to identify his work in whatever context it may appear."²¹ His studies thus begin with the presumption of singular authorship ("unaided plays") and proceed to collaboration (tellingly glossed as "dual or doubtful"). Furthermore, his results assume that a writer's use of *ye* for *you* and of contractions like *'em* for *them* is both individually distinct and remarkably constant "in whatever context."²²

These assumptions are challenged by evidence Hoy himself adduces. Problematically, as Hoy realizes, "there is no play that can with any certainty be regarded as the unaided work of Beaumont,"²³ and he admits that "Beaumont's linguistic practices are themselves so widely divergent as to make it all but impossible to predict what they will be from one play to another."²⁴ Beaumont's presence will thus be ascertained as that which remains after Fletcher, Massinger, *et al.* have been subtracted. Further, because he finds *The Faithful Shepherdess*, though "undoubtedly Fletcher's own," linguistically at odds with his other unaided works, Hoy omits it from his tabulation of evidence establishing Fletcher's "own" distinctive style.²⁵ Hoy's results are, furthermore, rendered problematic by the frequency of revision in these texts and the mediation of copyists, actors, compositors, and their "linguistic preferences" between Hoy's hypothetical writers' copy and the printed text he actually analyzes.²⁶ Additional

²⁰ Cyrus Hoy, *The Shares of Fletcher and his Collaborators in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon (I)*, 1956 STUDIES IN BIBLIOGRAPHY 130.

²¹ *Id.*

²² *Id.* at 130-31.

²³ *Id.* at 130.

²⁴ Cyrus Hoy, *The Shares of Fletcher and his Collaborators in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon (III)*, 1958 STUDIES IN BIBLIOGRAPHY 86.

²⁵ Hoy, *supra* note 20, at 142.

²⁶ Though he is largely engaged in the same project as Hoy, R.C. Bald demonstrates that distinguishing ostensible scribal and authorial pronoun preferences is fraught with difficulties. See R.C. Bald, BIBLIOGRAPHICAL STUDIES IN THE BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER FOLIO OF 1647, at 93-102 (1938).

questions arise when we consider the complexities at the outset of collaborative writing, which may have included, according to Sheldon P. Zitner, "prior agreement on outline, vetting of successive drafts by a partner, composition in concert, brief and possibly infrequent intervention, and even a mutual contagion of style as a result of close association."²⁷

This last item in Zitner's series highlights the extent to which he remains in Hoy's paradigm, in which one writer's healthy individual style must be protected from infection by another's. Zitner thus exhibits Hoy's problem at a more theoretical level. We might note that the presumed universality of individuated style depends on a network of legal and social technologies specific to post-Renaissance capitalist culture (e.g. intellectual property, copyright, individuated handwriting).²⁸ Furthermore, the collaborative project in the theatre was predicated on *erasing* the perception of any differences that might have existed, for whatever reason, between collaborated parts. Moreover, writing in this theatrical context implicitly resists the notion of monolithic personal style Hoy presumes: a playwright im/personates another (many others) in the process of writing a play-text and thus refracts the supposed singularity of the individual in language. At the same time, he often stages in language the *sense* of distinctive personae, putting "characteristic" words in another's mouth. What Hoy says of Beaumont—

His linguistic "preferences"—if they can be termed such—are, in a word, nothing if not eclectic . . . [i]t is this very protean character which makes it, in the end, quite impossible to establish for Beaumont a neat pattern of linguistic preferences that will serve as a guide to identifying his work wherever it might appear

— might apply to all playwrights in this period.²⁹ Indeed, the playwright of this era often thought to be most individuated—Shakespeare—has likewise been characterized by the diversity, protean quality, and expansiveness of "his" language.³⁰

²⁷ FRANCIS BEAUMONT, *THE KNIGHT OF THE BURNING PESTLE, THE REVELS PLAYS* 10 (Sheldon P. Zitner ed., 1984).

²⁸ For an indispensable consideration of these issues, see Martha Woodmansee, *The Genius and the Copyright: Economic and Legal Conditions of the Emergence of the "Author,"* 17 *EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY STUD.* 425 (1984). For a brilliant revisionist history of handwriting and the signature, see JONATHAN GOLDBERG, *WRITING MATTER: FROM THE HANDS OF THE ENGLISH RENAISSANCE* (1989).

²⁹ Hoy, *supra* note 24, at 87.

³⁰ On the individuation of Shakespeare, see MARGRETA DE GRAZIA, *SHAKESPEARE VERBATIM: THE REPRODUCTION OF AUTHENTICITY AND THE 1790 APPARATUS* (1991).

A more detailed critique of Hoy's attributions is required and might investigate the extent to which Hoy's specific linguistic criteria (the pronominal forms *ye/you*, for example) are, as *OED* suggests, actually class-related differences—that is, the extent to which they reflect not an individual's linguistic preference or habit, but rather a subject inscribed in and constituted by specific linguistic practices. (This is an issue of some complexity, for *ye* rather than *you* may announce the writer's own inscription in class-coded language, and/or may be the writer's ascription of that language to characters within the text.) I cite here some of the more obvious difficulties of Hoy's work because he is considered both an exemplary pioneer of, and a reliable model for, twentieth-century considerations of collaboration. He illustrates both the distinctly modern notions of individuality and authorial property underlying such considerations, as well as the corresponding sites for a post-structurally informed historicist critique. Above all, we can see in his work the insistence with which modern scholarship has asked the author question; the ultimate object of this quest is to know "who is speaking" each and every word of the canon.

That an historically inappropriate idea of the author here effectively constrains interpretation is best illustrated by the modern bibliographical fact that Hoy's authorial attributions in the *Beaumont and Fletcher* canon, a series of seven articles published in *Studies in Bibliography* from 1956-1962, prepared the way for, and are the basis of, the "standard" edition of those texts, *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, which began to appear in 1966 under the general-editorship of Hoy's dissertation adviser Fredson Bowers (who also edited *Studies*).³¹ The collaborative plays in this influential edition, Bowers remarks, "have been grouped chiefly by authors,"³² and Hoy himself argues elsewhere that "[s]cholarly investigation of the authorial problems posed by collaborative drama is . . . a *necessary precondition* to criti-

Shakespeare's style (whether protean or utterly, brilliantly predictable) figured prominently—and was deployed by all sides—in the controversy surrounding Gary Taylor's (re)attribution of the ms. poem *Shall I die?* to Shakespeare. See Gary Taylor, *A new Shakespeare poem?* *TIMES LITERARY SUPP.*, December 20, 1985, at 1447-48; Gary Taylor, *Shall I die? immortalized?*, *TIMES LITERARY SUPP.*, January 31, 1986, at 123-24. For responses, see *Times Literary Supp. letters*, December 27, 1985-March 7, 1986. See also Stephen Orgel, *The Authentic Shakespeare* *REPRESENTATIONS*, Winter 1988, at 1-25.

³¹ See Cyrus Hoy, *The Shares of Fletcher and His Collaborators in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon (VII)*, 1962 *STUDIES IN BIBLIOGRAPHY* 88 n.10.

³² I Fredson Bowers, *Foreword* to *THE DRAMATIC WORKS IN THE BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER CANON* vii (Fredson Bowers ed., 1966).

cal and aesthetic considerations of such drama.”³³ Collaborative texts must submit to an editorial apparatus founded on singular authorship, their “authorial problems” solved, before interpretation is permitted to proceed.

What I want to suggest here is that Hoy’s mode of reading collaboration in early modern English drama merely as a more multiple version of authorship—a mode reproduced in editions and criticism of plays not only in the Beaumont and Fletcher canon, but also in the intersecting canons of Shakespeare, Massinger, Middleton, *et al.*—does not account for the historical and theoretical challenges collaboration poses to the ideology of the Author. Collaboration is, as we shall see, a dispersal of author/ity, rather than a simple doubling of it; to revise the aphorism, two heads are different than one.³⁴

Such a reconceptualization of Renaissance dramatic collaboration has profound implications for the way we interpret these plays. Bibliographical attention to a text is often considered to be prior to interpretation—establishing a definitive, authoritative set of words for subsequent hermeneutic explication—but shifting the focus from authorship to collaboration demonstrates the extent to which twentieth-century textual criticism has itself been an elaborate interpretive act framing all its efforts with Foucault’s constraining author.³⁵ Bowers’s prefatory words describing his general editorship of *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon* suggest, furthermore, that modern textual criticism reproduces in its own practice the privileging of author-based interpretation over collaboration:

The texts . . . have been edited by a group of scholars according to editorial procedures set by the general editor and under his close supervision We hope that the intimate connexion of one individual, in this manner, with all the different editorial processes will lend to the results some uniformity not ordinarily found when diverse editors approach texts of such complexity. At the same time, the peculiar abilities of the sev-

³³ Cyrus Hoy, *Critical and Aesthetic Problems of Collaboration in Renaissance Drama*, 1976 RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES IN RENAISSANCE DRAMA 4 (emphasis added).

³⁴ Compare WAYNE KOESTENBAUM, *DOUBLE TALK* (1989) (unwilling to engage collaboration’s potential for unsettling the unitary author (or the humanist subject of psychoanalysis)).

³⁵ For a critique of the editing/interpreting distinction, see THE MONKS AND THE GIANTS: TEXTUAL AND BIBLIOGRAPHICAL STUDIES AND THE INTERPRETATION OF LITERARY WORKS, TEXTUAL CRITICISM AND LITERARY INTERPRETATION 180-99 (Jerome J. McGann ed., 1985). De Grazia brilliantly demonstrates how the editorial apparatus itself functions to shape and constrain interpretation in editions of the Shakespeare canon. See DE GRAZIA, *supra* note 30.

eral editors have had sufficient free play to ensure individuality of point of view its proper role; and thus, we hope, *the deadness of compromise that may fasten on collaborative effort* has been avoided.³⁶

As in Zitner's rhetoric of collaborative "contagion," Bowers here seeks to protect from the deadly grasp of collaboration the "peculiar abilities" of the individual working in its "proper role." The danger collaboration poses to this editorial paradigm is likewise figured in the notion of "corruption" so important to twentieth-century editing of Renaissance texts, for "corruption"—the introduction of non-authorial material into a text during the process of "transmission"—is "collaboration" given a negative connotation. If the making of play-texts and theatrical productions was a collaborative enterprise, how can we edit out of the first folio version of *Hamlet*, for example, the "corruption" of "actors' interpolations"?³⁷ To do so is to deploy authorship as a constraint on interpretation in a way the text itself warns against:

Ham. And could'st not thou for a neede study me
Some dozen or sixteene lines,
Which I would set downe and insert?
players Yes very easily my good Lord.³⁸

This exchange, which I quote from the first quarto, is itself "set downe" and "inserted" differently in the folio and second quarto versions of the play (the latter described on its title-page as "enlarged to almost as much againe as it was").

Like bibliography, much of the more self-consciously interpretive "literary criticism" continues to rely implicitly on the assumption that texts are the products of a singular and sovereign authorial consciousness, and a reconception of collaboration also has manifold implications here. Emphasizing collaboration in this period demonstrates at the level of material practice the claim of much recent critical theory: the production of texts is a social process. Within Hoy's paradigm of collaboration, language is fundamentally transparent of, because it is produced by, the individual author; the language one uses is (and identifies one as) one's own. But if we accept that language is a socially-produced (and producing) system, then collaboration is more the

³⁶ I Bowers, *supra* note 32, at vii (emphasis added).

³⁷ On "verbal corruption" and actors' "interpolations" in *Hamlet*, see HAMLET 62 (Harold Jenkins ed., 1982).

³⁸ WILLIAM SHAKE-SPEARE, THE TRAGICALL HISTORIE OF HAMLET: PRINCE OF DENMARKE (Q1) at sig. E4v (London, for N.L. and Iohn Trundell 1603).

condition of discourse than its exception.³⁹ Interpreting from a collaborative perspective acknowledges language as a process of exchange; rather than cordoning discourse off into agents, origins, and intentions, a collaborative focus elaborates the social mechanism of language, discourse as intercourse.⁴⁰ “[I]f literature were as original, as creative, as individual, as unique as literary humanists are constantly saying it is,” Morse Peckham has noted, “we would not be able to understand a word of it, let alone make emendations.”⁴¹ A collaborative perspective also forces a re-evaluation of (and/or complicates) a repertoire of familiar interpretive methodologies—most prominently, biographical and psychoanalytic approaches—based on the notion of the singular author. Other traditional critical categories policing the circulation of language become problematic as well—for example, “plagiarism,” “borrowing,” “influence” (and its “anxieties”), “source,” “originality,” “imagination,” “genius,” and “complete works.”

The collaborative production of play-texts, as I have begun to suggest, was manifold, and it is important to note that collaborations between (or among) writers had differing valences. We will in the future want to investigate in more detail both the differences and the similarities of collaborations (between Beaumont and Fletcher, and, say, Chapman, Jonson, and Marston) that resulted from different positionings within the institutions of the theatre and outside it; crucial to such an analysis are Bentley’s distinctions between “regular attached professional” playwrights and those like Jonson situated between the theatre and a patronage network with significantly different socio-economic inflections. My point here, however, is to call for a revision in the way we have read Renaissance dramatic collaboration *generally*, and the ways we have deployed it in our readings of Renaissance dramatic texts. That is, I am contending that collaborative texts produced before the emergence of authorship are of a kind dif-

³⁹ McGann points out that even the text that seems to have been materially produced by one person exists fundamentally in the realm of the social; revision in authorial manuscripts, he argues, “reflect[s] social interactions and purposes.” See JEROME J. MCGANN, *A CRITIQUE OF MODERN TEXTUAL CRITICISM* 62 (1983).

⁴⁰ Stephen Greenblatt makes a related point in his discussion of “the collective making of distinct cultural practices and inquiry into the relations among these practices,” though in the next sentence he returns to singular “making” in labelling his subject “plays by Shakespeare.” STEPHEN GREENBLATT, *SHAKESPEAREAN NEGOTIATIONS: THE CIRCULATION OF SOCIAL ENERGY IN RENAISSANCE ENGLAND* 5 (1988).

⁴¹ 1 Morse Peckham, *Reflections on the Foundations of Modern Textual Editing*, 1971 PROOF 122, 144.

ferent (informed by differing mechanisms of textual property and control, different conceptions of imitation, originality, and the "individual") from collaborations produced within the regime of the author. I want to show more fully the implications of a collaboratively attuned (rather than authorially based) interpretation by examining a particular text in the Beaumont and Fletcher canon, a text of which the author-question has been often asked and (ostensibly) answered definitively: *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*.

We can take as a guide to a collaborative reading the sustained ambivalence the early printed texts of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* demonstrate toward authorship. *The Knight*, probably initially performed between 1607-1610, was first printed in a 1613 quarto, the title-page of which mentions no writer(s). The dedicatory epistle, however, notes:

[T]his vnfortunate child, who in eight daies . . . was begot and borne, soone after, was by his parents . . . exposed to the wide world, who for want of iudgement, or not vnderstanding the priuy marke of *Ironie* about it (which shewed it was no offspring of any vulgar braine) vtterly reiected it⁴²

The play, apparently unparented on its title page, is here the offspring of both a singular "braine" and plural "parents." (Further, it bears publicly a "priuy" birth-"marke" of this ambiguous lineage.) This situation is only complicated by the second and third quartos of the play (both dated 1635); these title pages announce that *The Knight* was "Written by Francis Beaumont, and Iohn Fletcher. Gent.," but they include a different prefatory letter, "To the Readers of this *Comedy*," which cites a singular "Author [who] had no intent to wrong any one in this *Comedy* . . . which hee hopes will please all."⁴³ Finally, in these subsequent quartos there also appears *The Prologue*, a speech transferred into this text from an earlier play, which explains, in the only sentence it alters from its 1584 precursor, that "the Authors intention" was not to satirize any particular subject.⁴⁴ Most modern editors emend "the Authors intention" to "the author's intention," but

⁴² THE KNIGHT OF THE BURNING PESTLE (Q1) at sig. A2 (London, for Walter Burre 1613) (emphasis in original).

⁴³ FRANCIS BEAUMONT & JOHN FLETCHER, THE KNIGHT OF THE BVRNING PESTLE (Q2) at sig. A3 (London, N.O. for I.S. 1635). The third quarto, often supposed to be a later reprint despite its stated date of 1635, is most easily distinguished from the second quarto by its spelling of "Beamount" on the title-page. FRANCIS BEAUMONT & JOHN FLETCHER, THE KNIGHT OF THE BVRNING PESTLE (Q3) (London, N.O. for I.S. 1635).

⁴⁴ BEAUMONT & FLETCHER (Q2), *supra* note 43, at sig. A4.

we would want to note in this context the fertile ambiguity of early modern orthographic practice, which does not distinguish genitive singular from plural or genitive plural—that is, it does not use another of authorship’s more recent technologies, the apostrophe, to separate the writer’s/writers’ propriety from his/their plurality.

A look at the preliminary material of these quartos demonstrates that, though authorship is intermittently present, it does not appear in anything approaching a definitive or monolithically singular form; all three quartos, like many others of this period, instead foreground in their apparatus a different network of textual ownership and production. Unlike the writer(s), the publisher Walter Burre does appear on the title-page of the first quarto, and he also signs the dedicatory epistle (quoted above) to Robert Keysar, the manager of the Blackfriars theatre where the play was first performed and the previous owner of the text. The epistle establishes an extended filiation for this child/text, arguing that, despite “his” failure in the theatre, he is “desirous to try his fortune in the world, where if yet it be welcome, both father and foster-father, nurse and child, haue their desired end.”⁴⁵ If the “father” here is the play’s writer (with Keysar as foster-father and Burre as nurse), his singularity jars with the “parents” noted above—although the parents who first “exposed” the text might also be read as the (boy) players. In sum, though no author (certainly no single author) emerges from these initial references to the play’s origins, the quartos’ preliminary materials do display a complex and shifting network of other authorities: the publisher Burre, the printer N.O., the acting-company manager Keysar, the inhospitable theatre audience, the players and their royal patron (the second and third quartos advertise the text “[a]s it is now acted by her Majesties Servants at the Privatehouse in *Drury lane*”), the writers Beaumont/Beamont and Fletcher (eventually, after both are dead), the “gentlemen” readers, and the unnamed writer of another play whose “intentions” are transferred over and now said to apply to the “Authors” or “author” of this play.

Later in the century (concurrent with the shift I earlier located in *anonymous*) the play’s authorial lineage becomes more important, but it is by no means more fully stabilized. A speech that probably served as a prologue to a revival between 1665-1667, for example, assumes that the play is solely Fletcher’s;⁴⁶ pub-

⁴⁵ THE KNIGHT OF THE BURNING PESTLE (Q1), *supra* note 42, at sig. A2v.

⁴⁶ See BEAUMONT, *supra* note 27, at 163-64.

lished in 1672, this prologue precedes by only seven years the ascription of the play as collaborative in *Fifty Comedies and Tragedies Written by Francis Beaumont And John Fletcher, Gentlemen* (the second folio).

I am obscuring from this textual history the fact that virtually all the recent editions of *The Knight* now place Francis Beaumont *solus* on their title pages.⁴⁷ Though the quartos situate the initially unauthored, eventually collaborated play within a collaborative network, these editions deploy an army of editorial glosses to contain the subversive ambiguities cited above, proceed to interpret the play via its relationship to Beaumont's other plays (no easy task, given the paucity of this canon) or to his class-position and family history, and separate it off from (to name some other possible contexts) other plays performed by the Children of Blackfriars, or other plays associated with the name "Beaumont and Fletcher."⁴⁸

The irony of reducing *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* to a single author is that it is perhaps the most wildly collaborative play of this period. By this point, it should be clear that I do not here mean "collaborative" merely in the usual, restricted sense of two or more writers writing together; this play exposes—in a way that we lose when we read it as the creation of particular individuals acting (as Bowers might say) in their "proper role"—the more broadly collaborative enterprise of the Renaissance English theatre.

From the moment the Citizen interrupts the actor speaking the prologue in his fourth line and climbs onto the stage, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* stages the somewhat contentious collaboration of an acting company and its audience. The audience becomes, literally, a part of the play, as the boy actors reluctantly agree to improvise, at the request of the Citizen and Wife, a play called *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*—starring the Wife's serving-boy Rafe—along with their rehearsed production of *The London Merchant*. This odd juxtaposition of genres—romance-quest and city-comedy—becomes increasingly complex, as the players at-

⁴⁷ For example: John Doebler's edition in the Regents Renaissance Drama series (1967); Andrew Gurr's edition for Fountainwell Drama Texts (1968); Michael Hat-taway's New Mermaids edition (1969); and Zitner's 1985 Revels Plays edition. All of these followed the 1966 publication of the play's "standard" edition (as edited by Hoy) in *The Dramatic Works* supervised by Bowers. See *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (Cyrus Hoy ed.) in I BOWERS, *supra* note 32 at I.

⁴⁸ For example, in EUGENE M. WAITH, *THE PATTERN OF TRAGICOMEDY IN BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER* (1969), the author of this now-classic study discounts *The Knight* as uncharacteristic before he proceeds to an analysis of the rest of canon 5.

tempt to accommodate and fuse the divergent plots. Like the framing prologues and epilogues of other plays, *The Knight's* opening lines (as well as its sustained amalgamation of plots) suggest the general situation of acting companies attempting to sell their representations within the proto-capitalist marketplace of Renaissance London: they are (in a sense that is constantly being re-negotiated) bound by the desires of their audience, at the same time that they participate in the construction of those desires. The economic valence of this transaction is foregrounded at several points in the play, as in the episode where the Citizen gives money to the actor playing the innkeeper for accommodating Rafe and thus for accommodating (literally and figuratively) the audience and its desire to see a knight-errant.

The boy who speaks for the players and negotiates with the citizens, like most prologue-emissaries between acting company and audience, invariably uses the plural and collaborative "we" to represent the company⁴⁹ and establishes joint ownership in "the plot of our Plaie."⁵⁰ A more comprehensive view, however, would see the entirety of the play's production (that is, the intersections of the "actors" " *The London Merchant* and "citizens" " *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*) as the corporate effort of the players—the collaboration of actors-acting-as-actors and actors-acting-as-citizens. This negotiation in turn brings into view another, silent collaborator in the larger production, the gentlemanly audience of the private theatre where the play is presented. No representative of this audience speaks, but the Boy, and occasionally the citizens, gesture toward its ostensibly more refined tastes:

Cit. Boy, come hither, send away *Raph* and this whoresonne Giant quickly.

Boy. In good faith sir we cannot, you'le vtterly spoile our Play, and make it to be hist, and it cost money, you will not suffer vs

⁴⁹ THE KNIGHT OF THE BURNING PESTLE (Q1), *supra* note 42, at sig. B1. *See also*, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, *supra* note 47, at 1-4 (Induction).

For reasons explored above, I quote not from an edition of *The Knight* governed by anachronistic notions of authorship, but rather from the first quarto, providing both page references to that text and the corresponding line numbers in the more accessible Hoy/Bowers edition cited *supra* note 47. Joseph Loewenstein notes acting companies' use of the first-person plural in *The Script in the Marketplace*, in REPRESENTING THE ENGLISH RENAISSANCE 266 (Stephen Greenblatt ed., 1988). My understanding of drama's eventual emergence as textual property is greatly indebted to this article.

⁵⁰ THE KNIGHT OF THE BURNING PESTLE (Q1), *supra* note 42, at sig. D4v. *See also* *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, *supra* note 47, at III.259.

to go on with our plot, *I pray Gentlemen rule him*.⁵¹

The play here suggests what must have been the more complex task of accommodation facing the players: negotiating between the desires of the private theatre's gentlemen-patrons and the citizens eager for "something notably in honour of the Commons of the Citty,"⁵² a process with economic ramifications, as these lines make clear.

This negotiation draws into play a number of divergent discourses, as I have already noted in passing; *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* is quite literally, in Barthes' famous phrase, "a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture."⁵³ The range of the play's "quotation," its discursive diversity, is immense in a way that I can only suggestively summarize; this is nevertheless another important way in which the play figures the collaborative enterprise of theatrical writing in this period.⁵⁴ Rafe's improvised adventures in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* appropriate and play with the discourse of romance-epic: he reads aloud an extended passage from *Palmerin de Oliva*, a romance translated into English in 1581; his subsequent adventures gesture toward episodes of *Don Quixote*, *Arcadia*, and *The Faerie Queene*; and he trains his "squire" and "dwarf" (two serving-boys) to speak in the antique chivalric discourse of those familiar texts.⁵⁵ Rafe's adventures also draw on a genre of plays about "prentice worthies."⁵⁶ The "actors" *The London Merchant* is a similar pastiche of genres ("prodigal" plays, romantic-comedies, city-comedies), and Jasper's appearance as the ghost of himself deploys a revenge-tragedy convention in the service of a marriage-plot. Furthermore, the play's collation of romantic comedy eventuating in marriage with Rafe's romance-quest ending in his own

⁵¹ THE KNIGHT OF THE BURNING PESTLE (Q1), *supra* note 42, at sig. F4v. See also *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, *supra* note 47, at III.292-96 (final emphasis added).

⁵² THE KNIGHT OF THE BURNING PESTLE (Q1), *supra* note 42, at sig. B1v. See also *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, *supra* note 47, at 25-47 (Induction).

⁵³ Roland Barthes, *The Death of the Author*, in *Image, Music, Text* 146 (Stephen Heath trans., 1977).

⁵⁴ The source-tracing textual glosses and commentary in the editions mentioned above—upon which I rely heavily in the discussion of "quotation" that follows—are themselves voluminously symptomatic and constitutive of the twentieth-century preoccupation with authorship and the transmission of textual property. For an important critique of the traditional relation of "source" to play-text, see Jonathan Goldberg, *Speculations: Macbeth and source*, in *SHAKESPEARE REPRODUCED: THE TEXT IN HISTORY AND IDEOLOGY* 242-64 (Jean E. Howard & Marion F. O'Connor eds., 1987).

⁵⁵ The relation of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* to *Don Quixote* is a matter of some controversy, especially if one is concerned about "Beaumont's" "originality." For a summary of the issues, see BEAUMONT, *supra* note 27, at 39-42.

⁵⁶ See *id.* at 28-31.

death may figure the emergent genre which the team of playwrights subsequently attached to this play were to make famous: tragicomedy.⁵⁷

At a more local level, the play continually exhibits its allusive permeability. Figuring the larger theatrical practice of importing music “originating” elsewhere to fit the current production, Master Merrythought’s lines are virtually all quotation/revisions of contemporary ballads and madrigals—some of which circulated orally, others in print. Modern editions attempt to separate these texts out of the texture of the play by italicizing them, labeling them “song,” and devoting appendices to their special status as music. As Zitner, with evident frustration, notes in his appendix “The songs”: “There are perhaps forty-one passages to be sung in *The Knight*. One says ‘perhaps’ since it is sometimes difficult to distinguish what is to be sung from what is to be spoken.”⁵⁸ (A variation on the theme with which we began: what does it matter whom one is singing?)

A similar difficulty of distinguishing parts within the collaborated texture characterizes the serving-boy/hero Rafe. As already noted, he speaks in chivalric discourse as “the Knight of the Burning Pestle,” and his first sustained utterance in the play is a recitation from *1 Henry IV*. Likewise, his speech at the end of Act IV parodies both the septenary meter of Elizabethan verse-narratives and May Lords’ May-Day speeches. The generic attentiveness of Rafe’s “tragic” death speech—about which the boy-actor complains, “‘Twill be very vnfit he should die sir, vpon no occasion, and in a Comedy too”⁵⁹—signals Rafe’s own construction out of allusion: the long narrative rewrites passages from *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Richard III*, and *Eastward Ho!* Furthermore (and potentially more subversive to an author-based notion of this text), Rafe’s last words, “oh, oh, oh, &c.”⁶⁰ are the same as Hamlet’s in the Folio version of that play, where they are often presumed by modern editors to be excisable from the “author’s” text as “actor’s interpolation.”⁶¹ Rafe’s final “&c.” succinctly

⁵⁷ Waith quarantines the play from this possibility by labelling it “Beaumont’s.” See WAITH, *supra*, note 48.

⁵⁸ BEAUMONT, *supra* note 27, at 173.

⁵⁹ THE KNIGHT OF THE BURNING PESTLE (Q1), *supra* note 42, at sig. K2v-K3. *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, *supra* note 47, at V.273-74.

⁶⁰ THE KNIGHT OF THE BURNING PESTLE (Q1), *supra* note 42, at sig. K3v. *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, *supra* note 47, at V.327.

⁶¹ HAMLET, *supra* note 37, at 62. Hamlet’s Arden editor, Harold Jenkins, calls these O’s “theatrical accretions to Shakespeare’s dialogue.” *Id.* at n.1. Terence Hawkes’s perceptive essay *That Shakespeherian Rag*, in *THAT SHAKESPEHERIAN RAG: ESSAYS ON A CRITICAL PROCESS* (1986), first brought Hamlet’s dying O’s to my attention.

marks his last moments as the actor's improvisatory collaboration with, and beyond, the script.

Lee Bliss has argued that "Rafe becomes of necessity [*The Knight's*] self-appointed dramatist: he must create dialogue and motivation that will give life and shape to . . . rather skimpy situational cues" and "labors manfully to impose narrative coherence."⁶² This is, she argues, "the young playwright's own situation."⁶³ While we might agree that Rafe is the central improvisatory, creative figure of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, to construct him as a type of the "presiding dramatist" (in Bliss's view, the young Beaumont) is to impose a constraining coherence on interpretation that the text militates against. For if Rafe is the author, he is the author as collaborator, improviser, collaborator of allusion—the locus of the intersection of discourses, but not their originator. More importantly, like the musical Merrythought, he does not exist outside, or independent of, the text; he is himself a construction of those discourses, the author as staged persona, "a tissue of quotations." Furthermore, like the "text" Barthes theorizes, a "multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash,"⁶⁴ Rafe is without origin—as the Wife puts it in her epilogue, "a poore fatherlesse child."⁶⁵ And to this extent he reproduces the troubled patrilineage of the text that begets him.

According to Foucault, "the author is the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning . . . a certain functional principle by which, in our culture . . . one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and re-composition of fiction."⁶⁶ And though, as we have seen, a dispersal of the author in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* does allow fiction to circulate more freely, we would be mistaken to think that the fatherless status of both the Knight (Rafe) and *The Knight* figures the freeing of fictions. *What Is an Author?* proceeds to such a visionary close, evoking a future in which fiction seems to circulate unlimited by authorial or other constraints, but Foucault himself acknowledges earlier in the essay that a culture devoid of

⁶² Lee Bliss, "Plot Mee No Plots": *The Life of Drama and the Drama of Life in The Knight of the Burning Pestle* 45 *MODERN LANGUAGE QUARTERLY* 3, 13 (1984).

⁶³ *Id.* at 3.

⁶⁴ See Barthes, *supra* note 53, at 146.

⁶⁵ THE KNIGHT OF THE BURNING PESTLE (Q1), *supra* note 42, at sig. K4. See also *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, *supra* note 47, at Epi.4.

⁶⁶ FOUCAULT, *supra* note 2, at 118-19.

all such mechanisms is “pure romanticism.”⁶⁷ This is a romanticism I do not want to reproduce in speaking of the early modern period. *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, we remember, has an extended filiation, which includes a “foster-father” and “nurse,” and the quarto preliminaries exhibit a network of constraining figures, including the previous owner of the text, the publisher, the actors, the theatre audience, and the readers of the printed texts—as well as the “author(s),” whose status is by no means fixed. Rafe may be “a poore fatherlesse child,” but he is also a servant/apprentice shown quite clearly to be constrained by a particular class-position and, in his adventures (however freely they may seem to proliferate), by the desires of his master and mistress.⁶⁸ Fiction in this play is also all too obviously limited by the discourses available to the Citizen and Wife, the generic repertoire of the actors, and their location within the competitive theatrical market.

As I’ve argued implicitly in the interpretation outlined above, all of these constraints are more relevant to an interpretation of this text than the author(s). Even such rigorous theorizations of the author as Wayne Booth’s “implied author” and Alexander Nehamas’s “postulated author” are problematic when applied to the interpretation of collaborative dramatic texts from this period. Nehamas, for example, writes that “[i]n interpreting a text . . . we want to know what *any* individual who can be its subject must be like. We want to know, that is, what sort of person, what character, is manifested in it.”⁶⁹ The need to postulate such an author—even (only) as “a hypothesis . . . accepted provisionally [that] guides interpretation”⁷⁰—is specific to certain historical moments and genres.

While these observations are obviously indebted to Foucault’s conceptual shift, I would at the same time want to interrogate his imagination of a post-authorial “constraining figure,” for it seems to register both a residue of intention left by the de-

⁶⁷ *Id.* at 119. Again, comparison with Woolf’s romanticized character *Anon* is instructive. See Woolf, *supra* note 7.

⁶⁸ The complexity of social class in this play is often too easily simplified by critics siding unselfconsciously with the actors and upper-class audience against the citizens’ supposed lack of sophistication and their “naive” interventions in “art.” Bliss, for example, derides the citizens because “they demolish the independent aesthetic status of the playwright’s work and overturn the traditional ideal of drama as a clarifying mirror of men and their relation to their world.” Bliss, *supra* note 62, at 4.

⁶⁹ Alexander Nehamas, *Writer, Text, Work, Author*, in *LITERATURE AND THE QUESTION OF PHILOSOPHY* 286 (Anthony J. Cascardi ed., 1987).

⁷⁰ Alexander Nehamas, *The Postulated Author: Critical Monism as a Regulative Ideal*, *CRITICAL INQ.*, Autumn 1981, at 145.

ceased author and a singularity that the above discussion seeks to complicate. We might speak instead of “constraining contexts” for the play; as I have argued, a more appropriate interpretation of *The Knight* is one guided and constrained by what we know about the discourses, figures, locations, and cultural practices participating in its emergence. The ambivalence of this text and this culture toward the author is itself one of those contexts.

My terms here are plural, for, as we have seen, this text defies even the ideally liberal constraint Foucault imagines, “fiction . . . passing through something like *a* necessary or constraining figure.”⁷¹ It may be that we will not be able to emerge from the Enlightenment legacy of that necessary individual. However, our attempts to do so in our investigations of the past—to see figures (plural) rather than the singular reflections of our authorial selves, to note for example that my writing and citing in the present essay collaborate with, among other things, the Chicago manual that prescribes “my” “style”—can be instrumental in that emergence. To revise the position from which we began: What, or rather how, does it matter who are speaking?

⁷¹ FOUCAULT, *supra* note 2, at 119 (emphasis added).

