

Detobel's Collected Essays

PART I – CHAPTER I — SHAKESPEARE: THE COURTIER

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The First Folio is prefaced by a dedication to the earls of Pembroke and Montgomery and the epistle to “the great variety of readers”, together about 900 words. Of these only a fraction is generally quoted, the description of the author as “gentle Shakespeare” and of his art: “His mind and hand went together: And what he thought, he uttered with that easiness, that we have scarce received a blot in his papers.” About 3% is considered of interest, the remaining 97% is, one must presume, either so plain or so insignificant as to require no comment. Yet is there really nothing more to ask about the prefatory matter of the Folio? Certainly we might wonder why Heminges and Condell, supposing (though this is a matter of some controversy) they are the real authors of these texts, write in the dedication to Pembroke and Montgomery that Shakespeare’s plays are “trifles” that the earls have deigned to favour, but in the epistle to the readers praise the plays as a phenomenal intellectual achievement. “Read him, therefore,” they exhort the reader, “and again, and again.” The trifles? And why do they affirm in the dedication to the earls that they are publishing the First Folio “without ambition either of selfe-profit or fame”, and display in the epistle to the readers a radically opposite, commercial, profit-oriented attitude: “Especially, when the fate of all books depends upon your capacities: and not of your heads alone, but of your purses. Well! it is now public, & you will stand for your privileges we know: to read, and censure. Do so, but buy it first. That doth best commend a book, the stationer says.” Why, at the portal of the First Folio, this heavensent literary venture, do we find this Janus-face?

The same Janus-face is put on by Sir George Peckham, the author of a prologue to another sort of venture – it, too, momentous: “There was no doubt in the minds of

contemporaries that two quite separate social groups were combining in overseas enterprises. In 1583, writing in support of a project for the colonization of Newfoundland, Sir George Peckham considered it ‘convenient that I do divide the adventurers into two sorts: the noblemen and gentlemen by themselves, and the merchants by themselves.’ He said he had heard that in fact two companies were going to be established, one for each class. And he shaped the propaganda accordingly. For the gentry he stressed the fine climate, the conditions favorable to landowners, the crops that could be produced, and the excellent hunting, including a description of a moose. For the merchants he provided a list of over 70 commodities which could bring them profit - with leopards, silkworms, pepper, and rubies quite unabashedly claimed for Newfoundland. This was the popular impression of the differences between the aims and interests of the two classes, and it was fairly accurate in gauging the temper of most merchants, whose prime concern was, naturally, for trade.”¹ Yet a few pages later the same historian suggests that more than “popular impression” may have lain at the basis of Peckham’s differentiations. “... the composition of the companies reveals that trade alone, despite its more reliable assurance of profit, could not attract the gentry as easily as could a colony or an exploration. Certainly they were interested in making money... But they rarely if ever came to depend on commerce for their livelihood. There was a glamour in overseas enterprise that inspired motives beyond the desire for profits... The motivation of the merchant was generally less complicated. He did rely on trade for living, and the return on his investment had to be his chief concern.”² What is reflected in the dedication to the earls of Pembroke and Montgomery and Sir George Peckham’s advertisement alike is the difference of the social roles allocated to gentry and merchants. To each class corresponded another set of attitudes and patterns of behaviour which was as much constitutive of class as a consequence of it.

¹ Rabb, Theodore K. *Enterprise & Empire, Merchant and Gentry Investment in the Expansion of England, 1575-1630*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967, p. 35.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 37-8

In the dedication aristocratic values are stressed, in the epistle mercantile values are. Printing and publishing were regarded on as “mercenary” by members of the nobility. Members of the nobility were not necessarily peers and even not knights. Nearness to the court and compliance with an unwritten behavioral code were other criteria. Philip Sidney, not a titled knight in the early 1580s, took strong aristocratic views, especially with respect to the publishing of poetry. After his death Fulke Greville oversaw the publication of his friend's works. In a letter to Sidney’s father-in-law, Sir Francis Walsingham, Greville writes: “besides he has most excellently translated among divers other 'notable' works Monsieur du Plessis’ books against atheism, which is since done by another as both in respect of the love between Plessis & him besides other affinities in their works, but especially Sir Philip’s incomparable judgement, I think fit there be made a stay of that mercenary book ... many other works as Bartas’ *Semaines*, 40 psalms translated into meter, etc which require the care of his friends, not to amend ... but only to see to the paper & other common errors of mercenary printing.”³

This “anti-mercenary” attitude can be traced back to feudal times. However, the feudal complexion of the aristocracy in the 16th century did not belong so much to the natural skin as to its makeup. In the 16th century the aristocracy was irrevocably metamorphosed from a feudal into a courtly class.

1. Two leisure-time poets: Hartmann von Aue and William Shakespeare

Hartmann von Aue was a German autor of chivalric romances, a contemporary of Chrétien de Troyes, writing about the turn of the 13th century. Nothing is known of him besides what he reports about himself in his romances. He is a knight serving his lord. And, a rarity in those times, he was a knight who could read and was proud of it, as he tells us in the opening lines of his romance *Der arme Heinrich (Poor Henry)*:

³ From Greg, W.W., *A Companion to Arber*, Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1967, pp. 144-5.

A knight so learned was,
that he read in books,
what he therein found written,
he was called Hartmann,
Serving man at Aue.

A serving man, a “sergeant” in old English terminology, was a knight serving his lord. In the opening lines of another romance, *Yvain*, he says he sometimes even writes poems himself:

A knight who learned was,
And from the books did read,
When he had no better use
for his hours,
also wrote poems.

Sir Philip Sidney, too, only wrote during his idle hours. He calls the *Arcadia* the “work of his idle hours”, “being but a trifle, and that triflingly handled.” So, by his own description, did William Shakespeare. In his dedication of *Venus and Adonis* to the earl of Southampton he vows “to take advantage of all idle hours, till I have honoured you with some graver labour.”

Another who only took to literary production in his “idle hours” was the French aristocrat Georges de Scudéry, brother of Mademoiselle Madeleine de Scudéry. In 1629 he publishes his play *Ligdamon et Lidias* and writes in the preface: “thinking to be but a soldier I found myself a poet... poetry is only a delightful pastime to me, not a serious occupation; if I am rhyming, then because I do not know what else to do and the only purpose of this kind of work is my private contentment; and far from being mercenary, the printer and the actors can witness to the fact that I sold them nothing, which at any rate they cannot pay for.” He then asks the reader to pay no heed to the errors he himself had overlooked, because “he is more accustomed to the fuse of the harquebus than to the wick of the candle and apter at arranging

soldiers than words and at squaring battalions than periods."⁴ Magendie, the author of the work on the theory of honesty from which the lines are quoted, qualifies this preface as “vaniteuse”, “conceited”. He might be right in one sense, in another he misses the significance of Scudéry’s words. Scudéry was by no means indifferent to literary fame. Seven years later he would explode with envy at Pierre Corneille’s success with *Le Cid* and heap reproaches of plagiarism and faulty style on him. But what Scudéry displays in his preface is not primarily an individual subjective attitude; he delivers his business card or, more exactly, his non-business card. In plain text he affirms that he is a member of the courtly aristocratic elite: I, Scudéry, am first of all a soldier, and poetry is something I enjoy in my idle hours, but it is not my occupation, and I don’t take money for my writings.

2. Serving the lord, serving the prince

Hartmann von Aue lived in feudal times. He had a reason to restrict his writing and reading to “idle hours”. The relationship between vassal and lord was one of loyalty. It was conceived as a personal relationship based on honour. The idea of profitable exchange was absent from the relationship or at least kept as remote as possible, the idea of serving put in the foreground. The vassal was devoted, not hired to the service of his feudal lord. Any activity other than military or other service to the lord had to be reserved for idle hours.

In Scudéry’s, actually by Sidney’s time, the rules had changed. Learning was no longer considered superfluous or a debasement for an aristocrat, altering the long-standing tradition of the majority of the nobility who had opposed letters and learning. The exhortation of a Spanish marquis in the last quarter of the 15th century reveals why: “La ciencia no

⁴ Quoted from Magendie, Maurice. *La Politesse Mondaine et les théories de l’honnêteté. En France au XVII^e siècle, de 1600 à 1660*. Geneva : Slatkine Reprint, 1970 (original edition of 1925), pp. 60-1.

emboda el fierro de la lanza nin face floxa el espada en la mano del cavallero”.⁵ (“Science neither blunts the sword nor slackens the spear in the hand of the knight.”) Even at the beginning of the 16th century many nobles thought learning incompatible with nobility. J.H. Hexter cites the answer the diplomat and humanist Richard Pace (1483-1536) received from “an unnamed gentleman on learning. ‘It becomes the son of gentlemen to blow the horn nicely, to hunt skilfully, and elegantly to carry and train a hawk.’ He added that ‘the study of letters was for rustics,’ that it was stupid, and that all learned men were beggars. ‘Rather should my son hang,’ than be learned, he concluded.”⁶ Hexter further indicates that the proportion of students of common to gentle origin at the university of Oxford in the third quarter of the sixteenth century was about five to three and five to six at the beginning of the seventeenth century, but that this proportion is biased because the presence of members of the latter group was not always registered. “An undeterminable number of gentle-born did not bother to matriculate in Oxford at all, although they had lodgings in a college.”⁷ Still, nearly forty years after Sir Thomas Elyot had claimed in his *Book of the Governor* (1531), a handbook on the education of the aristocracy from whose ranks alone Elyot held the rulers of the state could come, that learning and “honesty” (good manners) were two essential criteria. In his own book on the education of the youth, *The Scholemaster*, Roger Ascham warned young aristocrats not to persist in their neglect of learning and “honest” living as they would risk being overrun by learned commoners in the competition for offices of state.⁸

In fact, Ascham’s admonition had been taken to heart by the members of the aristocracy. The military function, still proclaimed the main occupation, was on the wane in favor of their role as officers, as statesmen in the administrative service of the Prince, which

⁵ Pelorson, Jean-Marc, *Les Letrados – juristes castillans sous Philippe III. Recherches sur leur place dans la société, la culture et l’état. Poitiers, 1980*, Poitiers, p. 208.

⁶ Hexter, H.J. “The Education of the Aristocracy in the Renaissance” in *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. XXII, March 1950, Number 1, p. 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.8, n.16. Hexter refers to Oliver CROMWELL, *Writings and speeches*, ed. W.C. ABBOTT, Cambridge, Mass., 1937-47, I, 27-8-

⁸ Ascham, Roger. *The Scholemaster*. Menston (Yorkshire): Scolar Press. Facsimile of the original edition of 1570, p. 14a.

in a centralizing realm had displaced the service of the regional lord. The old honor still mattered much, but it was complemented by another notion, derived from the Latin word for honor: “honestas”, “honesty”, a word covering a large range of meanings: honor, good manners, refinement, uprightness, civil behavior, etc. Ascham uses it a score and a half times on about the same number of pages in varying meanings.

Historians have not come into consensus with respect to the precise nomenclature of this 'new' aristocracy. Some stress the radical break with the old feudal nobility; others emphasize the continuity between the two aristocracies with appellations such as “refeudalization of society” or “bastard feudalism”. Our own preference lies with the designation of Norbert Elias, “courtly aristocracy”.⁹ The center of power had definitely shifted from regional allegiances to the sovereign and the court. It was the court which had taken in hand the reins of the civilizing process and which was seen as the fountain of all values. In his play *Poetaster* (IV.ix) Ben Jonson has the banished Ovid complain:

Within the court is all the kingdom bounded,
And as her sacred sphere doth comprehend
Ten thousand times so much, as so much place
In any part of all the empire else;
So every body moving in her sphere
Contains ten thousand as much in him
As any other her choice orb excludes.¹⁰

The words reflect not Ovid’s own thought but Ben Jonson’s own “Augustan values” as the editor and others term it.¹¹ On the surface, the term “Augustan” seems wholly inappropriate. Augustus was anxious to maintain every semblance of continuity of his reign with the past republican commonwealth. Consuls were still elected yearly, the senate was still considered

⁹ Elias, Norbert. *The Court Society*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, reprint of 2000; and *The Civilizing Process*, Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1983.

¹⁰ Ben Jonson, *Poetaster*. Edited by Tom Cain. The Revels Plays. Manchester University Press, 1995

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

the supreme governing body. Monarchic symbols were anxiously repressed. Augustus had no crown, no court, he lived not in a palace but in a house in Rome and called himself not king or emperor but “princeps”, “the first”. However, it was in the symbolic order that the republican institutions survived in a ritualized and idealized mode, while the monarchic character, obfuscated in the symbolic order, shaped the social and politic order. On the contrary, for the Elizabethan court, as for other courts of the Renaissance and early modern times, the display of kingly power, glory and splendor was an essential instrument of power sustenance. Yet on a more abstract level of functionality the epithet “Augustan” is quite apt and in some respects the Augustan term “principate” for the Roman empire might perhaps better describe the reality of the Elizabethan state than the more usual “absolute monarchy”.

Under the particular aspect which matters most in the present context the term “Augustan” is even apposite. To legitimize his comprehensive powers, Augustus had to hold up the appearances of the republican tradition. In early modern times, to legitimize the power of the monarch and the aristocratic claim to the natural leadership in the realm, a continuity had to be established with the feudal past to sustain the notion that leadership “traditionally” and “naturally” rooted in the aristocratic class. As the republican traditions lived on in a ritualized form in Augustus’ principate, so the feudal traditions in the absolute monarchy. The feudal military function of the aristocracy had grown obsolete, partly due to technological inventions, partly due to the political discredit the feuding aristocracy had suffered in the Wars of Roses. Though the courtly aristocrat was still eager to affirm that arms was his primary occupation, he likely handled them more often in joustings than in wars. According to the principles of the feudal relation of loyalty between vassal and lord, culminating in the ceremony of homage and the oath of fealty, the notion of “exchange”, or of a transaction based on mutual profit, was mercenary and profane. Mercenary activities were seen as irreconcilable with the rank of a feudal aristocrat as manual labor would be. It has been

pointed out by sociologists¹² that the rejection of acquisitiveness was an essential pre-requisite of the feudal aristocracy to distance itself from other social groups. Some seldom noticed particularities of the courtly society may have their roots herein: the cult of presents at court, the fact that annuities were most often formulated as grants without mentioning of services in return.¹³ The semantic metamorphosis of exchange into grant is satirized in Molière's comedy *Le Bourgeois-Gentilhomme* (1670). Monsieur Jourdain, who wishes to become a courtier, is still fearing that his and his father's trade will prove an unsurmountable obstacle to his ambition. The ingenious servant Covielle convinces him that his father had never been a cloth merchant (IV.iii):

Covielle. Yes. He was a very honorable gentleman.

Jourdain. What did you say?

Covielle. I said that he was a very honorable gentleman.

Jourdain. My father?

Covielle. Yes.

Jourdain. And you knew him very well?

Covielle. Assuredly.

Jourdain. And you knew him as a gentleman?

Covielle. Without doubt.

Jourdain. Then I don't know what is going on!

Covielle: What?

Jourdain: There are some fools who want to tell me that he was a
tradesman.

Covielle: Him, a tradesman! It's pure slander, he never was

¹² For instance Max Weber. *Economy and Society*. Edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. New York: Bedminister Press, 1968, *passim*.

¹³ Aylmer, G.E. *The King's Servants – The Civil Service of Charles I 1625-1642*. London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, revised edition 1974 (original edition 1961), p. 162.

one. All that he did was to be very obliging, very ready to help; and, since he was a connoisseur in cloth, he went all over to choose them, had them brought to his house, and gave them to his friends for money.

A similar mockery of courtly diction is found in II.iv of *The Return from Parnassus* (published in 1606 but acted some years earlier at Cambridge) :

Stercutio: Son, is this the gentleman that sells us the living?

Immerito: Fie, father! thou must not call it selling: thou must say: Is this the gentleman that must have the *gratuito*?

...

Stercutio: O, is this the grating gentleman? And how many pounds must I pay?

Immerito: O, thou must not call them pounds, but thanks.

Academico: Not pounds, but thanks! See, whether this simple fellow that hath nothing of a scholar, but that the draper hath blacked him over, hath not gotten the style of the time?

The 12th-century feudal knight Hartmann only wrote poems in his leisure time, his main occupation was military and political service to his lord. This was the field where he had to win his spurs. The same holds true for the 17th-century French aristocrat Georges de Scudéry. But in the latter's case the only lord was the overlord, the Prince, the king of France. What once had been an element of the feudal aristocratic ideology was now a basic element of

the courtly aristocratic ideology. On the publication of Baldasar Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* in 1528 Peter Burke comments: "By the standards of the time, writing a book and having it printed was a somewhat ambiguous activity for a courtier. Publication was associated with profit as well as fame... This made association with the press inappropriate for noblemen, at least in the eyes of some contemporaries... These prejudices were not universal. As we have seen Ariosto published his poem *Orlando Furioso* in 1516, and Bembo published his dialogues in 1505 and 1525."¹⁴ Indeed, in the *Book of the Courtier*, composed of book I-IV, Castiglione had pictured an ideal courtier who was not only skilled at arms but also accomplished in different sciences, under which is mainly to be understood letters and other arts such as music, painting, dancing, and had acquired in all these disciplines and in his behaviour as well a natural grace, an "effortlessness" which he coined *sprezzatura*. The etymology of the word *sprezzatura* itself is indicative of the aristocracy's contempt for the mercenary spirit. "*Sprezzatura* was not, literally speaking, a new word at all, but rather a new sense given to an old word, the basic meaning of which was 'setting no price on'".¹⁵ In Book IV, however, Castiglione insists that all these accomplishments do not have their end in individual perfection but in the service to the Prince. The ideal courtier should win by them the favor and the confidence of the Prince, "so that he can and always will tell him the truth about all he needs to know, without fear or risk of displeasing him."¹⁶ It was one of the ideological tenets on which the aristocracy based their right to rule. "La noblesse expose sa vie pour le salut de l'État et pour la gloire du souverain." (The nobility stage their lives for the commonwealth and the glory of the sovereign.)¹⁷ In this view the merchant, for naturally seeking profit, could assume no responsibility for the whole. The aristocracy was the visible hand which directed the pursuit of individual profit toward the overall interests of the

¹⁴ Burke, Peter. *The Fortunes of the Courtier*. The European Reception of Castiglione's *Cortegiano*. Cambridge: Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers Ltd. 1995, pp. 39-40.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁶ Castiglione, Baldesar. *The Book of the Courtier*. Translated and with an introduction by George Bull. Penguin Classics. London: Penguin Books Ltd. 1967, Book IV, p. 284.

¹⁷ La Bruyère. *Les Caractères*. Paris . Classiques Français, 1993 (first edition 1688), p. 214.

commonwealth, a view which Adam Smith's axiom of the "invisible hand" was to center in the individual two and a half centuries later. The service of the Prince and the commonwealth also sets the limits of the "stigma of print". Bembo's platonic dialogues, like Castiglione's book itself, could be conceived as a work of public interest. Ariosto's epic poem *Orlando Furioso* was at the same time a dynastic poem in honor of the Este family, serving a major purpose of any Prince, the representation of his glory and power. However, Ariosto's comedies were not published during his lifetime.

Hence Georges de Scudéry's insistence on writing poetry only for his private pleasure during his idle hours, and on caring not much for errors as this was not his profession (his true destiny being that of a soldier), and on seeking no profit from the publication of his play. These were merely stock phrases, clichés employed to emphasize that his behaviour did not violate the courtly aristocratic code. And it can be seen that similar catchphrases are being utilized in the dedication of the First Folio. The plays were "trifles" to the earls, as such they had to have been publicly regarded by aristocrats like themselves and Sidney. And apparently they would have been deemed "trifles" by Shakespeare, something done as a pastime in his "idle hours", as he himself stated in the dedication to *Venus and Adonis*. This means that Shakespeare either adopted the attitude of a courtier or actually was one. And Heminges and Condell do assure the reader: "We have but collected them, and done an office to the dead, to procure his Orphans, Guardians; without ambition either of self-profit, or fame: only to keep the memory of so worthy a Friend, & Fellow alive, as was our SHAKESPEARE". For commoners, members of a commercial playing company, whose manager Heminges was, it would have been both hypocritical and politically incorrect to declare they had not done it for profit and to subscribe the epistle to the readers, the first part of which is precisely that: a commercial promotion of the project. Yet in the dedication to the two earls Heminges and Condell are speaking as representatives of their "worthy friend and fellow SHAKESPEARE",

and if he were in truth a courtier their statement is perfectly in line with the attitude he would be obliged to take toward literary works of a private character.

Yet another statement, found in the epistle, can be interpreted as a confirmation of Shakespeare's courtier status. Castiglione had defined the behavior of the ideal courtier in purely aesthetical categories. All the examples used to illustrate the *sprezzatura* or "effortlessness" of the ideal courtier are taken from art, so that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish whether Castiglione is writing about behavior or a work of art. "Then again, in painting, a single brush stroke made with ease, in such a way that it seems the hand is completing the line by itself without any effort or guidance, clearly reveals the excellence of this artist, about whose competence everyone will then make his own judgment." And without transition he turns to the behaviour of the courtier: "The same happens in almost every other thing. Our courtier, therefore, will be judged to be perfect and will show grace in everything, and especially his speech, if he shuns affectation."¹⁸ Castiglione, Burke notes, practised this rule for his own book. He claimed "to have written it 'in a few days' (I.i), although we know that he rewrote and elaborated it over a number of years."¹⁹ In III.iv of John Lyly's play *Campaspe*, Alexander the Great, trying his hand at painting his beloved Campaspe, is criticized by the painter Apelles: "Your eye goeth not with your hand, your hand goeth not with your mind." And in the Folio epistle we find: "His mind and hand went together: And what he thought, he uttered with that easinesse, that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers." The statement could apply to either the playwright Shakespeare, or to the "effortlessness", the *sprezzatura*, of the courtier Shakespeare. In any case it would not mean that Shakespeare never blotted out a line, but that the end version of his plays created the same impression as Apelles' painting, to have been written "with one stroke of the hand".

3. The courtier and edition

¹⁸ Castiglione, *Book of Courtier*, p. 70.

¹⁹ Burke, *The Fortunes*, p. 32.

Today the Spanish author Francisco de Quevedo (1580-1645), courtier, diplomat, soldier, is best known for his picaresque novel *El Buscón* (*The Rogue*) and his lyrics, though he also wrote religious tracts. When it came to editing his works, however, he recognized his religious material but rejected what are now considered his greatest literary achievements. “Ironically, those writings that Quevedo sought to withhold from public view during his own life-time and in some cases openly denounced (for example, the picaresque novel *El Buscón*, ‘renounced at the request of the author, who does not recognize it as his own’) are today the basis upon which we have constructed his reputation for ‘authenticity’ and ‘originality’, qualities undoubtedly privileged far less in the seventeenth century than in post-romantic culture.”²⁰ The rejection is ambiguous, though. Outwardly, the author distances himself from those works and is at the same time confirmed as author by the publisher: “renounced at the request of the author.”

Customs with regard to printing were changing. In the 17th century the veil aristocratic authors were using had grown thinner, but there were still many authors reluctant to openly appear as editor of their own works. Balthasar Gracián (1601-1658), a Jesuit, only wrote one work, on a religious subject, under his own name. His more worldly works, *Oraculo manual y arte de prudencia* (*The Art of Worldly Wisdom*) or *El Discreto* (*Prudent Man*), precepts on how to behave at court, which still enjoy a wide readership, were edited by and under the name of his brother Lorenzo. Pedro Calderón de la Barca (1600-1681), the famous playwright, also a courtier, started the edition of his works in 1636, but his brother Joseph acted as editor. It is known that Calderón supervised the edition by his brother, but he himself did not want to come into the open as such. It is very likely that Gracián also supervised the edition by his brother, but he did not publicly assume the editorship. The more one goes back into the 16th century, the more conspicuous appears the “disregard” of Spanish

²⁰ Mariscal, George, *Contradictory subjects: Quevedo, Cervantes, and seventeenth-century Spanish culture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999, p.101.

authors for the edition of their works. Of the lyrics of Fray Luis de León (1527-1591) no authorized version exists. “This defective situation is common for our lyric poets of the Golden Age”.²¹ Juan Boscán (c. 1490-1542) translated Castiglione’s *Book of the Courtier*, which is published under his own name. None of his own lyrics, however, were printed during his lifetime. Toward the end of his life he prepared what would be the posthumous edition of his lyrics (an unauthorized version was published shortly before his death).

Travelling the same road back in England's history one obtains a similar picture. In 1645 the poems of the courtier-poet Edmund Waller (1606-1687) were published in his absence, Waller being in exile in France after an abortive conspiracy against Parliament. Back in 1651 he undertook no attempt to re-issue a corrected edition. It was not until 1664 that he gave his consent for a corrected version. Even then he did not figure as editor. It is the printer who wrote the preface. “When the author of these verses (written only to please himself, and such particular persons to whom they were directed) returned from abroad some years since, he was troubled to find his name in print; but somewhat satisfied to see his lines so ill rendered that he might justly disown them,... Having been ever since pressed to correct the many and gross faults (such as use to be in impressions wholly neglected by the authors) his answer was, that he made these when ill verses had more favour, and escaped better; ... These are the reasons which, for above twelve years past, he has opposed to our request;... Not so much moved with these reasons of ours (or pleased with our rhymes), as wearied with our importunity, he has at last given us leave to assure the reader, that the Poems which have been so long and so ill set forth under his name, are here to be found as he first writ them...”.²² In 1628 Lord Brooke, better known as Sir Fulke Greville, died, apparently having spent many years preparing what would be a posthumous edition of his complete works.²³ Only one was

²¹ Pedraza, Felipe B. y Rodríguez, Milagros, *Manuel de literatura española*, II. Renacimiento, Navarra: CÉNLIS, Ediciones, S.L., 1980, p. 534.

²² Waller, Edmund. *The Poems of*. Edited by G. Thorn Drury. London: Larence & Bullen, 1893.

²³ Rees, Joan. *Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke, 554-1628 - A Critical Biography*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971, p. x. “There was until recently, when they were acquired by the British Museum, a collection of bound

published, surreptitiously and without his name on the title-page, during his lifetime. This was his closet drama *Mustapha* in 1609. Sir Philip Sidney disdained publication of any of his work during his lifetime, expressing contempt in his *Apology for Poetry* for those who cause their work to be printed. “Upon this necessarily follows, that base men with servile wits undertake it, who thinke it enough if they can be rewarded of the Printer:... so these men no more but setting their names to it, by their own disgracefulness, disgrace the most gracefull Poesie.”²⁴

In the epistle to the reader in the First Folio it is said that Shakespeare was prevented from overseeing his work by death. “Overseeing”, not direct editing, would have been what the author Calderón did, certainly what Gracián would have done, and as Waller would have in 1664. In the dedication, however, it is stated that Shakespeare did not have the “fate to execute” his own writings, a phrase borrowed from testamentary language. Yet here there is a contradiction: the overseer and the executor were not the same person, the former supervised or watched the latter. So while at first sight it could appear that the epistle simply repeats what had already been expressed in the dedication, in fact the dedication has put forward an entirely different idea:

But since your L.L. have been pleas'd to think these trifles
something, heretofore; and have been prosecuted both them, and
their Author living, with so much favour: we hope, that (they
out-living him, and he not having the fate, common with some, to be
the executor to his own writings) you will use the like indulgence
toward them, you have done unto their parent.

volumes of his works at Warwick Castle consisting of scribal copies with corrections in Greville's own hand. It appears that Greville kept his works by him and added to them and revised them over a period of years, perhaps right up to the time of his death, but we do not know when the Warwick transcripts were made nor at what dates Greville made his corrections. Every work, consequently, is composed of a number of strata and it is impossible now to recognize and date these.”

²⁴ Sir Philip Sidney. “An Apology for Poetry” in Gregory Smith, op. cit., p. 194.

If we leave out the apposition “common with some” the contradiction disappears:

Shakespeare did not have the fate to “execute” or to edit his own plays because of his untimely death. It is generally agreed that the editions of his two long poems *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594) must have been carefully supervised by the poet. Thus we naturally conclude that he would have certainly wished to as fastidiously edit his plays in a volume of complete works but that he died before he could accomplish this. Yet we cannot ignore the apposition “common with some,” and if we read it in context, logically, the meaning is: Shakespeare did not have had the fate to edit his own work while alive; and, this fate is common to some. We should repeat: it is, according to the epistle's logic, common for some not to die before they can edit their work, for others it is not common not to die before they can edit their work: This is patently nonsensical: Death does not know such a custom. Yet here is the sensible truth conveyed by this apparently nonsensical declaration: it was indeed not common for courtiers to publish their literary works during their lifetime or altogether; but on the contrary, it was common for commoners to do so. As the author of *The Arte of English Poesie* observed: “And in her Majesty’s time that now is are sprung up another crew of courtly makers, noblemen and gentlemen of her Majesty’s own servants, who have written excellently well, as it would appear if their doings could be found out and made public with the rest, of which number is first that noble gentleman *Edward* Earl of Oxford.”²⁵.

Why should it not have been common for Shakespere of Stratford to be “the executor” of his own plays? As far as we know the question remains unanswered, and until now, unasked too.

²⁵ *The Arte of English Poesie*, by George Puttenham. Edited by Gladys Doidge Willcock and Alice Walker. Cambridge: At the University Press, 1936, p. 61.

