

Abstracts

Persona Pratica e Persona Poetica

PAOLA COLAIACOMO

Giambattista Vico's repositioning of Homer from singer to *author* of the nation of Greece is at the core of this anthological essay. A number of samples from Shakespearean interpretations by famous poets, philosophers, philologists, essayists, are ideally situated around Vico's famous thesis. The resulting collage is interspersed with my own reflections, in a sort of protracted dialogue with the chosen authors. Benedetto Croce posited the impossibility of writing a biography of Shakespeare on the imagined contrast between two radically divergent Shakespearean "personalities", the practical and the poetical, and quoted Emerson as representative of the "hybrid" biographical aesthetic which tried to conciliate the two. Taking my cue from Croce, I start by interrogating Emerson, whose famous apophthegm – "Shakspeare is the only biographer of Shakspeare" – sounds as the mature reprise of Hazlitt's high Romantic interpretation of Shakespeare's individual existence as an experiment in borrowing new and untried modes of being. But Vico's "discovery" about the only reliable authority on Homer being Homer himself was also active in Emerson's text, whether he knew it or not. Seen from beyond the Atlantic, the myth of the poet as author of a nation developed into the parallel myth of the birth of a new, democratic nation. Both founders of nations, Homer and Shakespeare, share parallel critical destinies.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Biography, Author, Authority, Nation, Democracy

How to Write a Biography of Shakespeare

DAVID ELLIS

The essay is a slightly modified version of the opening of the author's book, *The Truth about William Shakespeare: Fact, Fiction and Modern Biographies* (2012), reprinted here by permission of Edinburgh University Press. In these introductory chapters the types of evidence most sought after by biographical writers are discussed, as well as the lack of such information when it comes to Shakespeare's life. In particular, different strategies used by biography-writers over the years to make up for the lack of evidence, including the 'association'

of Shakespeare with the broader historical context of his age, are reviewed critically and shown to function within the dynamics of the contemporary cultural and publishing industry.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Biography, Evidence, Fiction, Historical context, Cultural industry

Shakespeare against Biography

JOHN DRAKAKIS

Shakespeare's 'biography' has proved a challenge partly because of the limited amount of documentary material available, but also because there is a problem that resides at the heart of 'biography' as genre. The problem lies in the extent to which the biographer interposes his or her own subjectivity into the narrative process itself. Virginia Woolf was one of the first to argue that all biography is to some extent 'autobiography'. Armed with this insight it is possible to detect in Shakespeare biographies the shaping hand of the biographer, and the insertion into the narrative of assumptions about human behaviour that in historical terms is anachronistic. The resulting contradictions emerge, even in particular readings of Shakespearean texts, and the positivistic assumptions that are often made about their allegedly referential frameworks. This emerges in a challenge to a particular reading of Shakespeare's *Sonnet 122* where many of the questions concerning representation are raised.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Biography, Virginia Woolf, Poetry, Representation

Who Was William Shakespeare?

GRAHAM HOLDERNESS

The essay reprises and updates the biographical questions discussed in a number of passages which previously appeared in the author's *Nine Lives of William Shakespeare* (The Arden Shakespeare, London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011), tackling the question of Shakespeare's identity as it is presented in contemporary television drama and cinema, in particular in *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), *A Waste of Shame* (2005), and the recent *Anonymous* (2011), as well as in the work of a number of influential Shakespearean biographers, in order to argue for the need of a "New Biography" of Shakespeare that will accept the challenge of addressing the "anxieties suppressed by the mainstream biographical tradition".

Keywords: Shakespeare, Biography, *Shakespeare in Love*, *A Waste of Shame*, *Anonymous*, Authorship

William Shakespeare: What He Was Not

ROBERT BEARMAN

In this essay I discuss the nature of historical evidence and the reasons for its survival and conclude that the documentation which has been unearthed to document Shakespeare's life, though admittedly sparse, is no less than for other of his contemporaries whose lives brought them only occasionally within the orbit of record-accumulating bodies. However, I then argue, with all necessary caution, that his absence from certain categories of surviving records does at least allow us to propose the sort of man he was not. His rare appearances in court, as plaintiff, defendant or accused do not, for instance (when compared with the record of many of his fellows), suggest a man of a litigious turn of mind, or a habitual rule- or law-breaker. The equally rare mentions of him in the entourage of the great landed families, or in token institutional employ, do not reflect a dependency on patronage or sinecures for an income. The complete absence of any evidence of his recusancy must surely carry some weight in assessing any Catholic (or Puritan) leanings he may, or may not, have had. I do not claim to have *proved* that such activities and concerns were completely outside his experience, merely to point out that, if we are seeking a better understanding of the man, these are not the obvious places to look.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Biography, Sources, Historical records, Documentation

John Florio and Shakespeare: Life and Language

DONATELLA MONTINI

Investigations into the link between Shakespeare and John Florio stretch back to the mid eighteenth century when, in his edition of the plays (1747), William Warburton suggested that "by *Holofernes* is designed a particular character, a pedant and schoolmaster of our author's time, one *John Florio*, a teacher of the *Italian* tongue in *London*". Since then, other modern critics have been haunted by a sort of 'magnificent obsession' to prove a connection, both in a biographical and/or in a linguistic perspective, between these giants of Elizabethan culture. However, no solid facts have been put forward but only conjectures about a possible, at best probable, acquaintanceship. Failing to find historical dates and documents which link Florio's and Shakespeare's lives, the essay suggests a re-examination and reappraisal of their supposed reciprocal influence, especially as far as their dramatic and didactic dialogues and Shakespeare's knowledge of Italian are concerned. The attempt is thus to combine a historical-pragmatic investigation into early modern dialogues with a historical framework which might account for 'the Shakespeare and Florio connection'.

Keywords: Shakespeare, John Florio, Biography, Early modern English dialogues, Proverbs, Historical pragmatics

The Traces of Shakespeare's Life

STEPHEN GREENBLATT

The first essay included in the 2010 *New Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, eds Margreta de Grazia and Stanley Wells, is reprinted here by permission of Cambridge University Press. It introduces and comments upon “the key surviving traces” of Shakespeare’s life, discussing documentary evidence and the printing of Shakespeare’s name on a number of Quarto editions and on his non-dramatic works, the composition of the 1623 Folio and the work of its editors, the details of Shakespeare’s life that emerge from “centuries of archival labour”. The word “trace” – as opposed to the idea of “fact” – is a keyword in this compact exploration of Shakespeare’s life that re-considers the known biographical data while acknowledging as “deeply human” the reader’s desire to know more about the man.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Biography, Historical evidence, Traces

Shakespeare's Many Lives

NADIA FUSINI

Taking as its point of departure Henry James’ short story “The Birthplace” (1903), which imagines the life of the custodian of Shakespeare’s birthplace, this essay explores the idea of literary biography as an art, constantly hovering between the two extremes of “scrupulous fidelity” and “anachronistic imagination”. The essay proceeds to investigate some of the psychological motivations of those who contest Shakespeare’s authorship, in order to ask the question of whether a “proper writing of lives” may be said to exist, with particular reference to the relationship of the “writing I” to the “living I”, and drawing also on Woolf, Lacan, Foucault and Blanchot to discuss the notion of the author’s life and name.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Biography, Henry James, Authorship, Name

Shakespeare's Lack of Care for His Plays

ANDREW GURR

Recent insistence that Shakespeare must have wanted his plays to be read runs counter to the fact that he never took any care to get his plays into print. Evidence,

from the conditions that evoked the first Quarto of *Titus Andronicus* to the first Quarto of *Henry V*, all testifies to his lack of concern with print. No evidence exists to say that he cared as much for his plays as we do now. His change of career in May 1594, from would-be poet to common player, suggests that he then, probably under pressure from the authorities above him, surrendered his ambition to be a major poet, and instead gave himself over to the trade that made him so much more money. A survey of hard evidence supports this view, from what is written about his dyer's hand in the sonnets to the consistent evidence that it was the company, not the author, who controlled seeing his plays into print. This all endorses the idea that Shakespeare never valued his plays as much as we do.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Print, Playbooks, Quartos

Shakespeare's Illegitimate Daughter

GARY TAYLOR

This essay considers the biographical implications of the increasing acceptance of Lewis Theobald's claim that *Double Falsehood* (1727) is based on a seventeenth-century manuscript of the lost play *The History of Cardenio*, written by Shakespeare in collaboration with John Fletcher in 1612 or early 1613. A great variety of scholarly studies have provided compelling evidence that, although *Double Falsehood* does contain some additions and alterations by Theobald, it cannot be a forgery. This validation of Theobald's honesty means that we must also consider the possibility that he was also honest in reporting that the play was written for Shakespeare's "natural daughter". Could Shakespeare have fathered an illegitimate daughter? This essay re-examines the history of attempts by biographers to deny Theobald's claim, in the context of other evidence for Shakespeare's unconventional sexual behavior.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Biography, *Double Falsehood*, Lewis Theobald, *Cardenio*, Illegitimate daughter

A Salvo for Lucy Negro

HAROLD BLOOM

This essay was originally published in *Harper's Magazine*, 298:1787 (April 1999) as part of a special section on the question of authorship surrounding the works of Shakespeare. The writer discusses Shakespeare's sonnets, arguing against the notion that the poems were not written by Shakespeare himself but by the earl of Oxford.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Biography, Authorship, Sonnets, Oxfordianism