Shakespeare’s Popularity in Print

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Abstract
Asseses “the scope of Shakespeare's bibliographic presence” from 1594 to 1660 by comparing the number of editions of Shakespeare to those of his contemporary playwrights, as well as the number of reprints and title-page ascriptions. Concludes that his substantial popularity in print contradicts the belief that Shakespeare was indifferent to the publication of his plays and anticipates “his authorial pre-eminence in later centuries.”

Reference
THE POPULARITY OF SHAKESPEARE 
IN PRINT 
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This article assesses the scope of Shakespeare's bibliographic presence in the early modern period. We have long known that approximately half of Shakespeare's plays were published during his lifetime, that some were reprinted early on, and that thirty-six of them were gathered in the First Folio in 1623. Many companions to Shakespeare contain a chapter on the early editions: 'Shakespeare Published', 'Shakespeare's Plays in Print', 'Shakespeare Writ Small: Early Single Editions of Shakespeare's Plays', 'Shakespeare in Print, 1593-1640', and so on. The early chapters of David Scott Kastan's Shakespeare and the Book cover similar ground, and Andrew Murphy's Shakespeare in Print also devotes a chapter to 'The early quartos'. What these chapters, useful though they are, do not examine in any detail is the comparative popularity of Shakespeare in print: how present was Shakespeare as 'a man in print' compared to contemporary writers, in particular contemporary playwrights? Did Shakespeare sell well? Were his playbooks more or less popular than, say, Jonson's or Fletcher's? By how much? Judging by his presence as a man in print, what kind of authorial status did Shakespeare have in early modern England? These are some of the questions this article proposes to investigate.

It may be useful to start by taking a snapshot of the presence of Shakespeare's writings in the London book trade. Let us briefly look at a single year: 1600. It is true that this is an extraordinary year for Shakespeare, with more publications than in any other year during his life, yet the year's total book production, with approximately 300 titles produced and published in London, is also of unprecedented scope. The subject matter to which the greatest part of these titles was devoted is religion, which accounted for over a third of the total output. A fair number of other books dealt with historical and political subjects (about

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ten per cent each) and a smaller number (about five per cent) to science or to what we might call sociological subjects (commerce, education, good conduct, tobacco pamphlets, and so on). A handful of books concerned the arts (music and the fine arts) and sports. Finally, quite a considerable segment of the year's book production, approximately thirty per cent of the titles published, was devoted to what we now call 'literature', a category under which a surprising range of texts appeared, including translations from Latin (Ovid's *Heroides*, translated by George Tuberville) and from vernacular languages (e.g. Edward Fairfax's rendering of Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*), romances (the anonymous *Heroicall Adventures of the Knight of the Sea*), plays (Thomas Dekker's *Shoemaker's Holiday*), prose fiction (Thomas Deloney's *The Gentle Craft*), collections of tales (Robert Armin's *Fool upon Fool*), lengthy narrative poems (*The Legend of Humphrey Duke of Glocester*, by Christopher Middleton), verse satires (*Pasquil's Mad-Cap*, by Nicholas Breton), allegorical poems (*Cyril Tourneur's The Transformed Metamorphosis*), epyllia (Christopher Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*), elegies (*An Italian's Dead Body. Stuck with English Flowers*, by Joseph Hall and others), religious poetry (Robert Southwell's *Saint Peter's Complaint*), epigrams (Thomas Rowland's *The Letting of Humour's Blood in the Head-Vein*), poetic miscellanies (*The Paradise of Dainty Devices*), anthologies (*England's Parnassus, or the Choysest Flowers of our Moderne Poets*), single-sheet verse ('As Pleasant a Ditty As Your Heart Can Wish'), and ballads (Thomas Deloney's *Most Pleasant Ballad of Patient Grissell*).

Given the breadth of the bibliographic production, Shakespeare made a remarkable contribution to the year's output: the first editions, all in quarto, of *Henry V*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *2 Henry IV*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Merchant of Venice*; the second editions, also in quarto, of *The First Part of the Contention (2 Henry VI)* and *The True Tragedy of Richard, Duke of York (3 Henry VI)*; and the fourth and fifth editions (the second and third in octavo) of *The Rape of Lucrece*. In other words, no fewer than nine books published in 1600 were by Shakespeare. Moreover, two commonplace books (*England's Parnassus: or the Choysest Flowers of our Bel-vedere, or, The Garden of the Muses*) and a poetical anthology (*England's Helicon*) were published the same year with excerpts from Shakespeare's writings. If we add these to Shakespeare's plays and poem published in 1600, we arrive at a total of twelve books — about four per cent of the year's output — which contain writings by Shakespeare. It seems fair to say that Shakespeare had a remarkable presence in the London book trade at the turn of the seventeenth century.

I. SHAKESPEARE, POET AND DRAMATIST

Shakespeare is mostly remembered today as a playwright, but his debut in print took the form not of a play but of a narrative poem, *Venus and Adonis*, published in 1593. It remained very popular, receiving a second edition in 1594, another eight before the end of Shakespeare's life. With a total of ten editions, *Venus and Adonis* is Shakespeare's most successful publication during his lifetime, well ahead of the most popular playbook, *1 Henry IV*, with six editions. *The Rape of Lucrece*, Shakespeare's second narrative poem, was also popular: it reached

4 For the approximate percentages in the preceding division of subjects, see Edith L. Klotz, 'A Subject Analysis of English Imprints for Every Tenth Year from 1480 to 1640', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 1 (1937-38), 417-19. H. S. Bennett divides up the book production in similar fashion: 'Religion', 'Law', 'Education', 'Medicine', 'Information', 'Arithmetic, astronomy and popular science', 'Geography', 'History', 'News', and 'Literature' (*English Books and Readers, 1558-1603* (Cambridge, 1965), pp. 112-258). The Early English Booktrade Database (Project Director: David L. Gants), in 'A Discussion of Project Methods', proposes the following subject division: 1. Information, including works on language, business training and skills, education, husbandry, popular science and medicine. 2. Ephemera, including ballads, almanacs, catalogues and news pamphlets. 3. History, both popular and scholarly. 4. Law & Politics, including law books and non-religious polemics. 5. Literature, including belles lettres and popular, classical and travel works. 6. Official Documents, including forms, and proclamations. 7. Religion, including sermons, bibles, prayer books, instruction and commentary along with controversial and devotional works' (www.lib.unb.ca/Texts/Gants/EEBD/methods.html, accessed 10 October 2008).
print in 1594 and was reprinted five times in the course of Shakespeare's life. It received three more editions by 1653 and *Venus and Adonis* six more by 1636.

The popularity of Shakespeare's narrative poems has led Roger Chartier and Peter Stallybrass to argue, in an essay published in 2007, that 'The "authorial" Shakespeare was above all Shakespeare the poet, not Shakespeare the dramatist.' Before we agree with this statement, we need to take a closer look at the evidence. 'Shakespeare the poet' had of course more publications to his credit than the two narrative poems: in 1609, Shakespeare's *Sonnets* (with 'A Lover's Complaint' appended to them) were published in quarto format. They proved strangely unpopular and were not reprinted until the Benson edition of 1640, more than three decades later. In addition, 'Shakespeare the poet' found his way into print in the form of *The Passionate Pilgrim*, a miscellaneous collection of twenty poems, which appeared in 1599. Only five poems in *The Passionate Pilgrim* are now confidently assigned to Shakespeare, although the early title-pages attribute to him the collection as a whole. With three editions in Shakespeare's lifetime, *The Passionate Pilgrim* was reasonably successful, yet without approaching the popularity of *Venus and Adonis* or even that of the most popular plays, *1 Henry IV*, *Richard II* or *Richard III*. The picture that emerges of the popularity of Shakespeare the poet in his own lifetime is thus rather complex: an extremely popular early narrative poem, a second very popular early narrative poem, a reasonably popular collection published approximately half-way through Shakespeare's career, and a distinctly unpopular collection of sonnets published late in his career. This picture does not conform to what Chartier and Stallybrass may be taken to suggest, namely that Shakespeare the poet, contrary to Shakespeare the dramatist, was consistently popular in print.

Nor is it true that the bibliographic presence of Shakespeare the dramatist pales in comparison with that of Shakespeare the poet. On the contrary. During Shakespeare's lifetime, forty-five editions of his plays appeared in print, as opposed to twenty editions of his poems. It is true that many of these playbooks did not advertise Shakespeare's authorship, but twenty-six of them did, which is still more than the total number of poetry editions. Chartier and Stallybrass argue that 'Before 1623, the name of Shakespeare as a published writer was above all connected to the two narrative poems that he had written in the 1590s,' but in fact more than two-thirds of the editions of Shakespeare's writings published during his lifetime were playbooks, and so were almost 60 per cent of the editions which identify him as the writer, on the title page or — as


9 Chartier and Stallybrass, ‘Reading and Authorship’, p. 39.
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is the case with *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* — in the dedicatory epistle.

Chartier and Stallybrass find support for their belief that "authorial" Shakespeare was associated with his poetry rather than his drama by turning their attention to a collection, constituted by an early reader, which binds together *Venus and Adonis* (the edition of 1599), *Lucrece* (1600), and *The Passionate Pilgrim* (1599) with Thomas Middleton's narrative poem *The Ghost of Lucrece* (1600) and *Eamariculfe, Sonnets written by E.C. Esquier* (1595). Given that only three of the collection's five books are attributed to Shakespeare, it is perhaps rather strained to call the collection 'quasi-Shakespearian'. If this gathering of early editions can be said to make for a 'quasi-Shakespearian' volume, then so, surely, could one of the volumes of plays which was assembled by Sir John Harington (1561–1612): it contains thirteen plays, including *Richard III*, *1 Henry IV, The Merchant of Venice, Hamlet, King Lear, The London Prodigal*, wrongly attributed to 'William Shakespeare' on the title-page of the 1605 quarto, and *Locrine* ('By W. S.' according to the 1595 title-page). The volume contains four more plays, all non-Shakespearian, including *King Lear* (1605), which Harington marks as 'old' so as to distinguish it from 'King Leyr' by 'W. Sh.'. Yet Chartier and Stallybrass, though aware of the Harington volume, argue that 'authorship played no role in the organization of his collection' and thus oppose the poetry, associated with the "authorial" Shakespeare as suggested by the quasi-Shakespearian volume, to the plays, for which the authorial association remained allegedly unimportant during Shakespeare's lifetime. Accordingly, they argue that the Pavier quartos, the nonce collection of Shakespeare playbooks of 1619, constituted 'the first serious attempt to materialize Shakespeare as a dramatic author in the form of a bound book'.

Yet, in fact, such a collection existed considerably earlier, long before Shakespeare's death; and contrary to the volume of poetry mentioned above, it is genuinely made up of writings by Shakespeare. According to a 1627 inventory in EL 6495 (part of the Ellesmere MSS collection at the Huntington Library), the remarkable library of Lady Frances Egerton, first Countess of Bridgewater, contained a set of eight bound volumes of plays, and the first one on the inventory list is called 'Diuers Playes by Shakespeare 1602'. The other playbook volumes feature no authorial designation but are simply referred to as 'Diuere playes'. Approximately halfway through Shakespeare's career, even before the publication of *Hamlet*, a collection of playbooks — not of poems — thus existed which was authorial, genuinely the first attempt, as far as we know, 'to materialize Shakespeare as a dramatic author in the form of a bound book'. This fact confirms what the number of playbooks as compared to the number of poetry books suggests, namely that in terms of his appearance in print, Shakespeare, during his lifetime, was first and foremost a dramatist.

2. THE POPULARITY OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS IN PRINT, 1594–1642/1660: NUMBERS OF EDITIONS

How then does the bibliographic presence of Shakespeare, the dramatist, compare to that of his contemporary playwrights? The question of the popularity of playbooks has received sustained scholarly attention in recent years, most notably by Alan Farmer, Zachary Lesser and Peter Blayney.

11 Stallybrass and Chartier, 'Reading and Authorship', p. 40.
12 Stallybrass and Chartier, 'Reading and Authorship', p. 41.
13 Stallybrass and Chartier, 'Reading and Authorship', p. 42.
14 Stallybrass and Chartier, 'Reading and Authorship', p. 42.
Yet despite the fact that their debate has come to a head in the journal *Shakespeare Quarterly*, in three articles published in 2005, their work, including Blayney's seminal 1997 article on 'The Publication of Playbooks', shows little interest in the specific case of Shakespeare. Indeed, a reader could easily come away from reading Blayney's 1997 article thinking that Shakespeare playbooks were not particularly popular. Blayney compiles a best-seller list with eleven plays, of which only three are by Shakespeare, and with none of them appearing at the top of the list. Blayney adds that if he had included 'closet and academic plays', this 'would have pushed Shakespeare firmly out of the top five', adding that 'Shakespeare's best-selling work, *Venus and Adonis*, outsold his best-selling play by four editions'. None of this is wrong, but the effect of Blayney's influential essay, to the extent that it focuses on dramatic authors, is to suggest that Shakespeare's playbooks were relatively unpopular.

My aim here is not to make a contribution to the debate over whether playbooks constituted a significant share of the book trade in early modern England. Rather, my chief objective is to arrive at a better sense of Shakespeare's authorial presence in print, with which I hope to contribute to a re-evaluation of Shakespeare's authorial standing in his own time, in which a variety of scholars have recently participated, including Richard Dutton, James Bednarz, Brian Vickers, Patrick Cheney, Henry Woudhuysen, Jeffrey Knapp and MacDonald P. Jackson.

The point is sometimes made that Shakespeare, from early on, outshone his contemporaries not only as a playwright writing for the stage but also as a dramatist in print. John Jowett, for instance, in *Shakespeare and Text* (2007) writes that 'By 1600 Shakespeare had become the most regularly published dramatist'. Other critics, however, seem more inclined to stress the radical difference between Shakespeare's authorial standing in the eighteenth century and that before. In *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, 1557–1695, in a chapter devoted to 'Literature, the Playhouse, and the Public', John Pitcher writes that 'The modern dispute about who the seventeenth century regarded as its pre-eminent dramatist — Shakespeare or Jonson or Beaumont and Fletcher — is not yet concluded, because literary historians are properly concerned not to project back into this earlier period the reputation Shakespeare subsequently enjoyed'. We might be tempted, Pitcher seems to be saying, to consider Shakespeare the seventeenth century's pre-eminent dramatist because of the eminence he later came to acquire, but we should beware of jumping to such a conclusion without good evidence. Others have even categorically contested that Shakespeare was the most popular dramatist during his active life and the decades immediately following it. Gerald Eades Bentley devoted a two-volume study to answering the question of Shakespeare and Jonson's...
relative popularity, concluding that ‘throughout the [seventeenth] century until the last decade Jonson was more popular in England than Shakespeare’, adding that ‘Clearly, Jonson, and not Shakespeare, was the dramatist of the seventeenth century’ and that ‘Jonson's general popularity was greater than Shakespeare’s from the beginning of the century to 1690.’

The instances of Jowett, Pitcher and Bentley suggest that no scholarly consensus has emerged so far, and a closer investigation may therefore seem desirable.

A fairly basic way of investigating the bibliographic presence of Shakespeare, the dramatist, compared to that of his contemporaries is to count the number of editions in which their playbooks appeared. Yet as soon as one starts undertaking such a count, various methodological questions arise: what kinds of plays should be included or excluded? How about closet drama or university drama or drama translated from other languages? What about plays which were written in co-authorship, such as Titus Andronicus? And what about collections containing several plays, such as the Shakespeare First Folio, which contains thirty-six plays, the Jonson First Folio, with nine professional plays, or the 1590 octavo edition of the two parts of Tamburlaine? The first figures I present here include all plays written in sole or co-authorship (so The Two Noble Kinsmen is counted not only as one of Shakespeare's but also as one of Fletcher's plays); in addition, I concentrate in the first stage on playbooks rather than play-texts, meaning the number of times a publisher invested in a playwright, be it in the form of a collection or a single play. Finally, I focus throughout the rest of this essay on what Farmer and Lesser call 'professional plays', plays, that is, that were written for adult or boys' companies performing them in front of paying audiences.

The result of this first count is that for the whole period from the beginning of the publication of professional plays to 1642, when public performances ceased, Shakespeare, with 73 editions of playbooks, out-publishes all his contemporaries by more than 50 per cent. The second most published playwright is not Jonson, who has only 22 editions of playbooks to his credit by 1642, nor Middleton, whose total is 25, nor Beaumont or Fletcher, for whom I count 26 and 34 editions respectively, but Thomas Heywood, with 49 editions, which is 15 more than Fletcher, and over 20 editions ahead of everyone else.

Table 1 lists the number of editions of playbooks, per dramatist, for the period up to 1642, and includes all playwrights with at least 15 playbook editions to their credit. Even though public performances stopped in 1642, the publication of playbooks did not, so 1642 may seem an arbitrary end point and 1660 a valid alternative, all the more so as this may do better justice to playwrights who, contrary to Shakespeare, were still active during the Caroline period. In Table 2, with the period extended to 1660, Shakespeare still comes first with 75 editions. Only two of Shakespeare's plays were reprinted between 1642 and 1660, King Lear and Othello, both in 1655. Yet Shakespeare's number of playbooks up to 1660 is still almost one and a half times that of Heywood, almost twice that of Fletcher, and twice or more that of everyone else. Shakespeare exceeds Jonson's number of playbooks by a factor of more than three. Heywood's prominence in print is easily overlooked. For instance, David Kastan, in Shakespeare and the Book, writes that 'in his own age more editions of [Shakespeare's] plays circulated than of any other contemporary playwright', adding that 'Eventually the prolific Beaumont and Fletcher would close the gap'. According to my count, Beaumont and Fletcher never came close to rivalling Shakespeare, and the playwright who came closest to doing so was Thomas Heywood.

A few words of caution before I proceed: reduced into simple figures and tables, my statistics look more straightforward than they are, and this for more than one reason. First of all, collaborative plays are so common that they cannot be ignored,

22 See Farmer and Lesser, 'Popularity', p. 6, in particular note 24.
yet their inclusion inevitably distorts the evidence. *Eastward Ho!,* for example, a collaborative play by Jonson, Marston and Chapman, received three editions, all dated 1605. In my count, the play appears under all three playwrights, adding three editions to their totals, even though each of them wrote no more than a part of the play. My figures for playwrights who often wrote collaboratively thus exaggerate the amount of their dramatic writing that was available in print. Shakespeare, even though he collaborated on a number of plays, did so much less than many of his contemporaries; so what this means for my figures is that Shakespeare’s superiority in terms of the bibliographic presence of his dramatic writings may have been even greater than my tables suggest.

A further problem is that the authorship of many collaborative plays is a matter of ongoing scholarly discussion and may never be known with certainty. *The Spanish Gypsy,* for instance, was ascribed to
Thomas Middleton and William Rowley on the title page of the first quarto (1653), but a number of scholars, including David J. Lake, argue that it was written by Thomas Dekker and John Ford, whereas Gary Taylor, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works* contends that all four contributed to the play. In a situation like this, I adhere to the argument I find most convincing — meaning that presented in the Middleton *Collected Works* in the case of *The Spanish Gypsy* — but it is clear that the authorship of many early modern plays, and in particular of collaborative plays, will remain a matter of debate and that, therefore, figures such as those presented here cannot be considered definitive.

### 3. THE POPULARITY OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS IN PRINT, 1594–1642/1660: NUMBERS OF REPRINTS

The preceding statistics give us a sense of the number of editions of dramatic writings by Shakespeare and his contemporaries that were published in the early modern period, but they fail to distinguish between simple quarto playbooks and collections, including large Folio collections, and therefore do not assess how many play-texts and editions thereof were available in print. Clearly, the totals of dramatists whose plays were published in large collections (such as Shakespeare, Jonson, and Fletcher) are affected if we take into account the individual plays these collections included rather than only the collection as a whole. Whereas the statistics for playbooks inform us of the number of commercial ventures publishers undertook, the figures for play-texts are more apt to convey the availability in print of the full breadth of the playwrights’ dramatic output.

Such an examination documents with even greater clarity Shakespeare’s predominance as a published playwright in early modern England, as Table 3 makes clear. In the period up to 1642, the texts of Shakespeare’s 39 published plays — meaning the 36 plays in the First Folio plus *Edward III*, *Pericles*, and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* — appeared in a total of 144 editions, almost 90 more than Heywood, with 55. Due to the nine plays in the 1616 Folio, Jonson comes third, but remains over a hundred play-text editions behind Shakespeare. (Playwrights with fewer than fifteen editions are again not recorded.) If the period is extended to 1660 (Table 4), Fletcher, thanks to the Folio of 1647, overtakes Heywood and gets somewhat closer to Shakespeare but, with 146 editions of play texts as opposed to Fletcher’s 77, Shakespeare still out-publishes Fletcher by a factor of almost two to one, with the number of Heywood’s editions being approximately 40 per cent and Shirley, Jonson, Massinger and Beaumont’s fewer than 30 per cent of Shakespeare’s.

The preceding figures give us a sense of the total number of editions in which the plays appeared, but they tell us little about how well Shakespeare’s or other dramatists’ plays sold once they were in print. The total number of editions conveys how often stationers decided to invest in plays by certain authors but, if we are interested in knowing whether these investments proved worthwhile, then — as Farmer and Lesser have insisted — we need to focus on reprint

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rates. A reprint means that an edition had sold out, or was on the point of selling out, and that the publisher anticipated enough of a demand for a second edition to pay for its production. Since expenses for a reprint were considerably lower than for a first edition, reprints tended to be considerably more profitable than first editions. Of course, on a purely textual level, reprints are often less interesting than so-called substantive editions, insofar as they simply copy the text of an earlier edition. E. K. Chambers’s view may be representative of how little value was long attached to reprints: ‘several of the plays had been reprinted from time to time’, Chambers wrote, adding that ‘there is not much to be said about the reprints’.

More recently, however, Sonia Massai’s study of Shakespeare and the Rise of the Editor has warned us against underestimating the textual importance of

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reprints, showing that many of them contain local, but important, editorial interventions. Independently of the question of the textual importance of reprints, bibliographically they are crucial witnesses to a book's popularity.29

Blayney's article, 'The Publication of Playbooks', led the way in establishing the importance of reprints. He counted the professional plays published between 1583 and 1642 and their reprints, showing that 'Fewer than 21 per cent of the plays published in the sixty years under discussion reached a second edition inside nine years' (p. 389). This allows for an instructive comparison with Shakespeare: 13 out of Shakespeare's 22 plays published separately in quarto or octavo format — that is the 19 published during Shakespeare's lifetime plus Othello (1622), The Taming of the Shrew (1631) and The Two Noble Kinsmen (1634) — received at least a second edition inside nine years, that is almost 60 per cent, as opposed to the 20 per cent for all professional plays, meaning almost three times as many. Since comparatively few plays first published during the Caroline period reached a second edition — what Farmer and Lesser call 'The Caroline Paradox'30 — it may be more pertinent to focus on an earlier, shorter period. Blayney writes that 'Of the 96 plays first published in 1583–1602, only 46 (just under 48 per cent) were reprinted inside twenty-five years. The percentage is slightly higher for the plays of 1603-1622 (58 out of 115, or just over 50 per cent). If we add up Blayney's figures, then 104 of the 211 plays published between 1583 and 1622, or not quite 50 per cent, reached a second edition within 25 years. As for Shakespeare, 20 of his plays were first published during the same years and only three of them, 2 Henry IV, Much Ado About Nothing, and Troilus and Cressida, did not receive a second edition within 25 years; so the rate of plays that reached at least one reprint within a quarter century is an astounding 85 per cent, as opposed to the not-quite 50 per cent for playbooks in general. Of the 17 Shakespeare plays that were reprinted at least once, seven received two editions, four went through three editions, three through four, Richard II through five, Richard III through six, and i Henry IV through seven editions. On average, the twenty Shakespeare plays published between 1594 and 1622 received 2.95 editions (59 editions for the 20 plays), or almost three editions per play, within 25 years of original publication. If we consider The Whole Contention as a separate playbook rather than as a reprint of The First Part of the Contention and True Tragedy, and if we add The Taming of the Shrew (1631) and The Two Noble Kinsmen (1634), which received no reprints, and the 1623 Folio (reprinted in 1632), then the average number of editions drops slightly but remains high at 2.6.

This frequency of reprints and the scarcity of Shakespeare playbooks that did not reach a second edition are even more remarkable if we now look at some of Shakespeare's contemporaries. Only three of John Lyly's nine playbooks published between 1584 and 1632 received at least a second edition, one of them going through three, and one through four editions within 25 years. Five of George Peele's plays reached print between 1584 and 1599, of which only Edward I reached a second edition. The only play to which Peele contributed which was even more successful is the mostly Shakespearean Titus Andronicus of which Peele seems to have written Act I and two or three additional scenes,32 which went through three editions within 25 years. Robert Greene contributed to a commercial hit, A Looking Glass for London and England, co-authored with Thomas Lodge, which went through five editions within 25 years. Yet of the five plays Greene seems to have written in sole authorship, only one received a second edition, whereas the other four did not.

29 For 'second-plus editions', see Farmer and Lesser, 'Popularity'.
As for Shakespeare's later contemporaries, 23 of Thomas Heywood's playbooks appeared between 1599 and 1656, of which 15, or more than 65 per cent, failed to reach a second edition within 25 years. Some of Heywood's early plays were genuinely popular, though without rivalling the popularity of Shakespeare's playbooks: in Shakespeare's lifetime, ten of Heywood's plays appeared in print, of which two received a single reprint, one two, one three, two four, and one even five editions within 25 years, with the remaining three failing to receive a second edition.

While Heywood's popularity as a print-published dramatist, judging by the number of reprints, was clearly inferior to Shakespeare's, it was distinctly superior to that of many others. Fourteen of Chapman's playbooks found their way into print between 1598 and 1639, and only two of them received at least a second edition within 25 years. The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles Duke of Byron was reprinted 17 years after the first edition, and only the collaborative Eastward Ho! had considerable commercial success, with three editions. Similarly, 21 of Thomas Dekker's plays were published between 1600 and 1658, of which 16, or 75 per cent, were never reprinted, while three plays received a second and two a fourth edition within 25 years. As for John Marston's 12 playbooks published between 1601 and 1633, three of them went through three editions, and two of them through two, but as many as seven plays were not reprinted within a quarter century of original publication. Thomas Middleton, now rightly considered as one of the greatest Renaissance dramatists since the Oxford Collected Works has established the full scope of his dramatic oeuvre, was no more popular in print judging by the rate of reprints. Twenty of his playbooks appeared between 1604 and 1657, of which six received a second edition, and only two a third within 25 years, whereas 12 remained without a reprint inside 25 years. Of William Rowley's ten (mostly collaborative) playbooks which appeared between 1607 and 1660, seven remained without reprint and three reached a second but none a third edition.

As for Ben Jonson, 11 quarto playbooks were published between 1600 and 1620, of which eight failed to receive a reprint within 25 years, and the three that were reprinted include the collaborative Eastward Ho! Jonson's First Folio reached a second edition after 24 years, but the Second Folio of 1641, which partly built on the abortive 1631 Folio, failed to receive a second edition within 25 years, as did The New Inn, published in octavo in 1631.

Of Shakespeare's Jacobean and Caroline successors, 17 of Philip Massinger's playbooks were published prior to 1660, of which only five reached a second edition and none a third within a quarter century. Eight plays, or play collections, by Richard Brome were published prior to 1660, and only two of them reached a second edition within 25 years. Finally, 11 of Ford's plays were published in quarto between 1629 and 1660, and only one of them received a reprint, while 31 playbooks by James Shirley were published between 1629 and 1657, of which 27 remained without a reprint inside a quarter century.

What all of the dramatists I have just mentioned have in common is that the majority, and often the vast majority, of their playbooks failed to reach a second edition within 25 years. In fact, apart from Shakespeare, there appear to be only four exceptions to this rule: Marlowe, Webster, Beaumont and Fletcher. Seven of Marlowe's plays reached print between 1590 and 1633. Three of them were not reprinted within a quarter century of original publication. Thomas Middleton, now rightly considered as one of the greatest Renaissance dramatists since the Oxford Collected Works has established the full scope of his dramatic oeuvre, was no more popular in print judging by the rate of reprints. Twenty of his playbooks appeared between 1604 and 1657, of which six received a second edition, and only two a third within 25 years, whereas 12 remained without a reprint inside 25 years. Of William Rowley's ten (mostly collaborative) playbooks which appeared between 1607 and 1660, seven remained without reprint and three reached a second but none a third edition.

33 In addition, the 1647 'Beaumont and Fletcher' Folio (not reprinted, with additions, until 1679) contains so many plays to which Massinger contributed that it deserves being considered as not only a Beaumont and Fletcher but also a Massinger playbook.

34 Note that the Tamburlaine plays appeared as a two-play collection in 1590, which was reprinted twice in 1593 and 1597, before the plays were published separately in 1605 (Part I) and 1606 (Part II). Since I am counting playbooks and distinguish collections from single plays, the 1605 and 1606 editions do not qualify as reprints.
before 1660, of which four received at least a second edition (including *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The White Devil*). Of the eight plays Beaumont wrote alone or in co-authorship, and which were published in quarto between 1607 and 1621, only two received not a single reprint within a quarter of a century, while three received as many as four reprints. As for John Fletcher, 14 of his plays were published in quarto format between 1610 and 1640. Of these, four were not reprinted within 25 years, but four received a second, two a third, one a fourth, and three even a fifth edition within the same period.

To sum up, if we calculate the average number of reprints per play by author (Table 5), then Beaumont heads the table, with exactly two reprints, followed by Shakespeare (1.6), Fletcher (1.45), and Marlowe (1.4). Since the number of first editions of playbooks is small in the cases of Marlowe (eight) and Beaumont (nine), their averages may not be very representative. For Marlowe, for instance, the average greatly depends on *Doctor Faustus*, with its eight editions. If we calculate the average number of reprints of Marlowe and Shakespeare without taking into consideration their most popular plays, *Faustus* for Marlowe and *1 Henry IV* for Shakespeare, then the average rate of reprints drops sharply, from 1.4 to 0.85, in the case of Marlowe, but only slightly, from 1.6 to 1.4, in that of Shakespeare. The representative table may thus be the one which confines itself to those playwrights with a solid corpus of at least ten different plays (Table 6). The noteworthy point about this table is not so much that Shakespeare, followed by Fletcher, heads the table, but that Shakespeare's reprint rate is massively superior to the playwrights in the lower half of the table, starting with Jonson and Dekker. The average number of reprints of a Shakespeare playbook is eight times that of a Chapman and almost four times that of a Jonson playbook.

If we calculate the average number of reprints within ten years of original publication, the popularity of Shakespeare's printed plays emerges with even greater clarity (Table 7). With almost one reprint per play on average, Shakespeare is ahead of everyone else by about a third or more. Lyly, much in vogue for a limited time, comes second, level with Marlowe. Beaumont and Fletcher figure considerably lower in Table 7 (reprints within ten years) than Table 6 (reprints within 25 years), suggesting that their popularity in print grew steadily and took some time to establish itself. If we again restrict the table to the playwrights with a representative corpus of at least ten different playbooks.
(Table 8), then the difference between Shakespeare and the others is even starker. Shakespeare’s average number of reprints again exceeds Jonson’s by a factor of almost four to one, and even Fletcher’s by two to one.35

With these figures in mind, we may now wish to return to the question of Jonson and Shakespeare’s comparative popularity. We remember that Bentley, in his two-volume study, argued that Jonson’s general popularity was greater than Shakespeare’s from the beginning of the century to

35 Note that, like Alan Farmer and Zachary Lesser, but unlike Peter Blayney, I include in the count editions published in the tenth or twenty-fifth year after the year of original publication (see Farmer and Lesser, ‘Popularity’, p. 31; and Blayney, ‘The Publication of Playbooks’). So a 1608 edition of a play originally published in 1598 is considered as having been reprinted inside ten years.
1690. However, the number of editions of Shakespeare playbooks up to 1660 is 76 as compared to 22 for Jonson, and the number of editions of play-texts for the same period is 146 for Shakespeare and only 41 for Jonson. In addition, and perhaps most eloquently as a comment on popularity, Shakespeare's reprint rate, both within ten and 25 years, is almost four times that of Jonson. It is true, of course, that there are other ways of judging the popularity of playwrights than the scope of their bibliographic presence. But I would argue that the print publications do provide important indications, and that book history has a contribution to make to the kind of research Bentley undertook in the mid-twentieth century. Bentley arrived at his very different conclusions by counting not editions but allusions to and quotations from the playwrights and their plays. What this suggests is that while Jonson may have been the writers' writer, who was endlessly drawn upon and pointed to, Shakespeare was the readers' writer, whose popularity called for a steady supply of new editions. Despite his literary ambitions, Shakespeare appears to have been popular in more than one sense, not only widely read but equally enjoyed by a less elite readership, unlike Jonson, who pleased not the million.

4. THE POPULARITY OF SHAKESPEARE, DRAMATIST, IN PRINT UP TO 1616

My analysis has so far focused on the period up to 1642 or 1660, but it seems important to examine also the number of publications during Shakespeare's lifetime. If we consider the period from 1584, when Lyly's and Peele's earliest playbooks were published, to the year of Shakespeare's death, then, as shown in Table 9, Shakespeare again comes out top with 45 editions, Heywood follows behind with about half that number, and Marston, third with 18, is followed by Dekker, Jonson, Chapman and Lyly, whose number of editions constitutes approximately one third of Shakespeare's.

The advantage of looking at playbook publication from this angle is that it can provide us with a sense of how Shakespeare's exact contemporary playwrights, and Shakespeare himself, may have experienced the success of their plays in printed form. During the time of his active career, Shakespeare was not only the most published playwright, but his bibliographic presence compared to that

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8. Average number of reprints within 10 years of playbook's original publication (2).

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of his contemporaries was massive. No two playwrights together saw as many editions of their plays reach print as Shakespeare did alone. Nor did Shakespeare have to wait until the end of his career to become the most published playwright: until 1597, this distinction had gone to John Lyly, who was in print with 12 playbook editions, but by the end of 1598, Shakespeare's total had risen to 14, Lyly's only to 13. By the end of 1600, Shakespeare had taken a commanding lead with 25 editions (Table 10), which he had further consolidated by the end of the year in which Queen Elizabeth died (Table 11).

It is true that many of Shakespeare's early playbooks were published without authorship attribution. In the 1590s, the majority of playbooks were published anonymously, although ascriptions were becoming increasingly common towards the turn of the century, and, as early as the first decade of the seventeenth century, the majority
of playbooks mentioned the author on the cover. Shakespeare's plays participated in this trend, and his number of title-page mentions soon surpassed that of his contemporaries. His name first appears on a title-page in 1598, in the second and third quartos of Richard II, the second quarto of Richard III, and the first extant (though in fact the second) edition of Love’s Labour’s Lost. With four title-page ascriptions, Shakespeare catches up at once with Greene, who also has four editions of playbooks with his name on the title page by 1598.

Shakespeare takes the lead the following year, with a fifth attribution on the title-page of 1 Henry IV, and distances Greene and everyone else in 1600, by the end of which Shakespeare's name figures on the title pages of no fewer than nine playbook editions. By the end of Shakespeare's life (Table 12), the number of his title-page mentions totals 28

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37 See the chapter devoted to 'The legitimation of printed playbooks in Shakespeare's time' in Erne, Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist, pp. 31–55.
(including the apocryphal *London Prodigal* of 1605 and *A Yorkshire Tragedy* of 1608), far ahead of Marston, Dekker and Jonson with temporaries is thus no less impressive than in the man with ii. Shakespeare's advance over his contemporaries is thus no less impressive than in the earlier tables. Clearly, not only Shakespeare sold, but so too did Shakespeare's name.

5. IMPLICATIONS OF THE EARLY POPULARITY OF SHAKESPEARE, DRAMATIST, IN PRINT

It was long believed that Shakespeare was indifferent towards, or even opposed to, the publication of his plays in print, a belief I find impossible to share, for reasons I fully explained in *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist*. My earlier study did not examine the publication of playbooks from the angle of the London book trade the way I have proposed to do here, yet I find confirmation for my earlier argument in the evidence presented in this article: if we go on believing in a Shakespeare with no interest in his plays in print, we would have to imagine an artist who was so single-mindedly theatrical that he was unaffected by his rise to dominance as playwright in print, and this while being intensely interested in books more generally, as both the fiction of his works and the wide reading he did before writing his plays and poems, makes clear. A Shakespeare thus mythographically constructed would seem more in keeping with the notion of the romantic genius, floating loftily above the material concerns of his own time and place, refined out of existence, paring his fingernails, than with the competitiveness of Shakespeare and his professional world, as suggested by Greene, Heywood and other early commentators. The present article thus adds to the argument advanced in my earlier book by suggesting that Shakespeare not only had the ambition of being a successful literary dramatist but that he really became one. The earlier study maintained that Shakespeare wanted to be published, bought and read; the present article argues that indeed he was all those things, and this on a scale unrivalled by any other early modern dramatist. Shakespeare's massive bibliographic presence in his own time which this article has established suggests that there was nothing fanciful about the ambition for which *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* argued. On the contrary, Shakespeare cannot have helped noticing that, thanks to the book trade, his ambition was fulfilled during his own lifetime.

The other chief purpose of this article has been to suggest that Shakespeare's texts, and in particular his playbooks, had a bibliographic presence of considerable scope in the first half of the seventeenth century more generally. Insofar as the question of Shakespeare's relative popularity in the seventeenth century is concerned, it makes sense, I believe, to distinguish between the first and the second half of the century. If we focus on the second half, it appears, as Paulina Kewes has argued, that Shakespeare's later pre-eminence was still very much in doubt. Yet if we focus on Shakespeare's own time, and the early seventeenth century, then it emerges, this article suggests, that Shakespeare was considerably more popular, judging by how often his plays...
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were printed, than his contemporaries. What this implies is that the question of whether playbooks were popular or not may have depended importantly on the identity of the playwrights: whereas the publication of the playbooks of many of Shakespeare's contemporaries seems to have constituted mostly unprofitable commercial ventures, that of Shakespeare's playbooks was mostly profitable, in fact several times more profitable, on average, than that of Jonson, Chapman and other contemporaries and successors. To a surprising extent, Shakespeare's popularity as a printed dramatist in his own time anticipated his authorial pre-eminence in later centuries.