

Who Was “Shakespeare”? Ideas of Authorship, Conspiracy Theories, Personality Cult, and a Debate Under Scrutiny

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1 Introduction

“Master Shakespeare. Next time you come to Greenwich come as yourself and we will speak some more.”¹ These words by Judi Dench as Queen Elizabeth I in John Madden’s 1998 film “Shakespeare in Love” are obviously fictional. As it will be shown, however, the boundaries between fact and fiction are often blurred when it comes to Shakespeare biography. Since the publication of the first Shakespeare biography by Nicholas Rowe in 1709, texts about Shakespeare’s life have kept appearing in large numbers. The story of his life that is woven around the known documentary facts differs greatly at times from one biography to the next. Even within a single text, the image of Shakespeare often is multi-faceted. Shakespeare-the-writer, Shakespeare-the-actor, Shakespeare-the-businessmen, the list of Shakespeare attributes is long. Graham Holderness in his latest work from 2011 postulates *Nine Lives of William Shakespeare*.

The problem apparently inherent in the whole mass of pages written about Shakespeare is that nobody ever seems to be able to really encounter Shakespeare-as-himself. In that respect, the Queen’s request in “Shakespeare in Love” may be more acute today than ever. In *Nine Lives* Holderness takes an interesting and cou-

¹ Compare: “Shakespeare in Love” (1998) directed by John Madden, 1:45:44-49.

rageous approach to biography in that he tries to put on display the process that leads to the partial fictionalization of the facts concerning Shakespeare's life. He explains that there are two sets of rules when it comes to biography: that of academic and scholarly discourse and that of creative and imaginative writing. It is his distinct aim to obscure the clear separation of the two sets of rules. Throughout his book he carefully indicates what is fact, what is fiction and what story might be developed from both. As a result, the reader is enabled to keep close track of the process that necessarily influences all Shakespeare biography.

I do not want to write yet another story of Shakespeare's life. With an awareness of the above-mentioned in mind I want to take a look at a certain field of Shakespeare biography – doubts. For more than 150 years a war has been raging: the Shakespeare Authorship Debate. I chose this rather dramatic formulation deliberately and for two main reasons: First, doubters, who believe in Shakespeare-the-businessman and maybe Shakespeare-the-actor but certainly not Shakespeare-the-writer, tend to fight passionately for their alternative candidate of choice (one they picked from over 70 suggestions). As I will show, it is rather themselves and their personal image of the author they fight for than the one they put in the foreground. Many of them are no professional Shakespeare scholars but they cannot be called laymen, either, because they often are intellectuals having invested whole lifetimes in the study of “Shakespeare”. The work and achievements of these non-professional Shakespeare scholars – as I call them here – must not be regarded as wholesale valueless. It seems to be the case, however, that the scholarly discourse bypasses them to a certain degree. Thus, one reason why the debate often takes dramatic forms is the very personal involvement of many of those fighting for one candidate or other.

Secondly, I will argue that the Shakespeare Authorship Debate became a war of beliefs a long time ago. What is attempted throughout the debate is something similar to a proof of God. Nobody can tell what God really looks like. Apparently, nobody can do so in the case of “Shakespeare”. The second reason for the fierceness the discussion often takes on lies, I will argue, in its quasi-religious dimension. Shakespeare-as-himself, the person who lived within the early modern world of English theatre – not above it² –, will remain to some degree a mystery to scholars, professional as well as non-professional. Having understood this, I want to take a step back and ask why it actually matters to know who Shakespeare was or why it began to matter.

In order to do so I structure this paper as follows: In chapter 1 I will look at the authorship question as a question of personal and circumstantial ideals. Francis Bacon, Edward de Vere and Christopher Marlowe will be presented as exemplary not only for main candidates of a certain time or epoch but also for the kind of historic figure chosen – philosopher, aristocrat and poet. The aim is to find out what kind of arguments are brought forward to defend or advertise the different

² This is also reflected upon by Grace Ioppolo (8-9).

candidates but also to try and detect patterns the respective claimants might share in their argumentation. In chapter 2 the authorship question will be formulated as a question of (religious) belief. At one level the origin of the debate as of religious context will be outlined. At another level analogies between worship of Shakespeare and worship of God will be pointed out. The deification of Shakespeare played an important role in the widening of the gap between Shakespeare-as-himself and Shakespeare-as-imagined. The authorship question as a question of ideas of authorship will be examined in chapter 3. It is here that the gap dividing Shakespearian scholarly discourse and the argumentation of non-professionals becomes the most apparent. Therefore, it is here that this rift receives its actual meaning for the reception of Shakespeare outside the academic world of literary criticism – something professionals must find an answer to. Finally, chapter 4 will try and join the already interlinked threads from the previous chapters in a more targeted way in order to come up with answers to the central question of this paper: Who was “Shakespeare”?

The literature dealing with Shakespeare’s life, alternative biographies and the authorship debate are vast. As John Michell puts it: “It would now be impossible to read it all. Not that anyone would want to, since much of it is repetitive, dull and cranky. It is the sheer weight of it that is so impressive.” (9). On that account, for chapter 1 I tried to select texts that are conceived of as representative or even groundbreaking by defenders of the same candidate. In the course of my discussion of each candidate, I will briefly present which texts might be considered such works.

Leading the way for this paper was James Shapiro’s *Contested Will. Who wrote Shakespeare?* Shapiro is one of the first Shakespeare academics to take the Authorship Debate seriously by asking how it actually came about. He arrives at an explanation of the reasons for his belief that it is indeed Shakespeare who wrote “Shakespeare” not by putting forth evidence against other candidates but by analysing why people started to doubt and why certain candidates were chosen over others as convincing alternatives. His method is to explain the development of the respective theories with personal experience and societal influence. I take a slightly different angle, though, asking who *was* instead of who *wrote* “Shakespeare”, placing an emphasis on “Shakespeare” images rather than the contents of particular theories.

Furthermore, I consider Seán Burke as of major importance for a more general discussion of authorship. *Authorship: from Plato to the postmodern. A reader* gives an overview over discussions of authorship by presenting key readings from Plato to twentieth-century theorists such as Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault thereby putting these texts into their historic contexts. For a more detailed discussion of twentieth-century approaches to authorship, *The death and return of the author: criticism and subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* also by Seán Burke might be helpful.

A work such as this obviously cannot go without asking why there is a prevailing interest in questions of authorship in the first place. The answer is that scholars

have been and still are in the middle of a debate attempting to come to the core of what an author actually is. The debate reached a first peak in the Romantic Age. The image of the author as genius in many cases is still dominant and very much alive in the Shakespeare Authorship Debate. A second peak was reached in the 1980s with the proclamation of ‘the death of the author’. The question is why “Shakespeare” did not die at this point if he was an author. The question is why, on the contrary, there was a wave of new publications dwelling on Shakespeare’s life in the 1990s. Today, there is a shift towards an acceptance of authorship as a collaborative effort – elaborated on, for example, in *Contested Will* (254-259). On top of that, more recent Shakespeare biographies – like Stephen Greenblatt’s *Will in the world: how Shakespeare became Shakespeare* and Holderness’s *Nine Lives* – show a growing awareness of the fictional and autobiographical aspects that influence all biography and especially that of Shakespeare.

An investigation of the Shakespeare Authorship Debate can contribute to this in that it distinctly shows how and to what extent personal, situational and societal aspects add to the perception of the past and the interpretation of facts. Sometimes both are hardly recognisable because filtered by time and circumstance. For this reason exactly, I ask who “Shakespeare” was. Along with this question, however, goes another one: Why does it matter?

2 The Authorship Debate As a Question of Personal Ideals

2.1 Francis Bacon – the Scientific Philosopher

“If you really want to know, once and for all, if there are authentic ciphers which prove, beyond a reasonable doubt, that Sir Francis Bacon, not William Shakespeare, wrote the plays and the sonnets, I tell you categorically that there are.” (Peck ix) In 2001, Andrew Stevens Peck chose a mathematical approach to the authorship question as is claimed on the blurb of his book. Not only does he want to show that Bacon’s authorship of the Shakespearian texts can be proved by the decoding of a hidden cipher but also that Bacon as legitimate heir of Queen Elizabeth I should have been king (x). It is writings like this which make it easy to ridicule proponents of Francis Bacon-as-“Shakespeare”. Anyway, Peck seems to be quite late with the publication of his book to contribute to the Authorship Debate in any meaningful way. Bacon as a candidate for being the author of Shakespeare’s plays was hotly tipped about 150 years before Peck. This is the reason why most texts proposing Bacon stem from the second half of the nineteenth century but there is no text that could be put forth as some kind of standard reference. After the idea had been born, many texts on the topic were published – quickly taking bold shapes.

As will become clear later, Peck poses an interesting example of how the Shakespeare Authorship Debate is kept alive, though. The hunt for a hidden cipher as a desperate search for any kind of proof is symptomatic. The complete lack of documentary evidence by which Francis Bacon could be linked to the works of Shakespeare left proponents of Bacon with nothing but the plays in their hands. They had no choice but to look for proof within these texts. Accordingly, attempts of deciphering “Shakespeare” are part of the Bacon Theory from a very early stage onwards (Mitchell 134-153; Shapiro 118-128).

The question is, of course, how the Bacon Theory came about when there is no documentary evidence pointing towards Bacon. Charles LaPorte as well as Shapiro suggests a theological origin of the Shakespeare Authorship Debate. Both LaPorte and Shapiro argue that it was only a matter of time until in the climate of religious criticism in the pious society of the mid-Victorian era the Shakespeare Question would arise (LaPorte 613-619; Shapiro 69-79). In 1835, David Friedrich Strauss in *The life of Jesus* had critically studied the Holy Script and the evidence at hand to conclude that Jesus might have been a noteworthy historic figure but certainly not divine. In order to prevent the spreading of Strauss’s ideas and with Shakespeare’s deification well underway, Shapiro argues that Samuel Mosheim Schmucker published *Historic Doubts Respecting Shakespeare* only to hit out at Strauss’s reasoning. “Parodying Strauss’s line of attack, Schmucker takes the reader step by step through all the reasons that prove that Shakespeare’s authorship is suspect.” (77) Schmucker missed his point. Instead of dispersing doubts concerning Jesus, doubts concerning Shakespeare began to grow in line with those affecting the Son of God.

Delia Bacon belonged to the first to pose a case for Bacon. She recognised a political meaning in the plays attributed to Shakespeare and suspected them to have been written in collaboration by a group of republicans under the leadership of Francis Bacon. She was the first to take the step and think of an alternative candidate. Bacon being one of the greatest minds of the Renaissance came to mind quite naturally. Bacon-the-scientist and Bacon-the-philosopher had a great reputation already, so why not add Bacon-the-poet as well (Shapiro, 89-90)? William Henry Smith had managed to publish a pamphlet with the title “Was Lord Bacon the author of Shakespeare’s plays?” one year before Delia Bacon in 1856. Smith claims in his text that Bacon’s life was exactly like how one would expect Shakespeare’s to have been (Shapiro, 105-106). The case for Bacon quickly gained momentum from then on.

In a more recent work from 1990 Penn Leary, himself a Baconian, summarizes the arguments usually brought forward in support of Bacon. Just to mention the most important:

The Baconians claim that the Stratford Shakespeare was not qualified to write the Works, and that Francis Bacon was. They claim that Bacon possessed the stupendous equipment – both natural and

acquired – for the miracle; and that no other Englishman of his day possessed the like; or, indeed anything closely approaching it (Leary, 34).

Consequently, the main argument for Bacon is his education and the explanation for his using a pseudonym is politics. As a statesman he had to be careful with every word uttered, which would have hindered him in the wording of his literature. For scholars of Bacon it is inconceivable, though, that he could have written the plays – a lot too scientific and precise seems to be his language and his thinking (Michell, 119-121). But for Baconians “Francis Bacon was the only man of his time who was capable of producing such great works.” (115) This is not surprising, however, when the growing importance of science and technology in the Victorian Age is taken into account. Bacon-as-scientist and philosopher was just the person to bridge the opposition of science and art when he could also be Bacon-the-poet. “[It] celebrated the marriage of science and sensibility.” (Taylor 214)

The decipherers of Shakespeare’s works fit well into that picture and the time when telegraph and Morse code became more and more prominent. By coming up with all kinds of ciphers and codes nobody could find but the ones promoting them, they combined a kind of spiritualism with technology (Michell 134-153). Yet, this was no concept made for the twentieth century.

2.2 Edward de Vere – the Aristocratic Autobiographer

“Once the compelling figure of Edward de Vere steps into the spotlight, however, wonder turns into doubt. De Vere’s candidacy as an alternative Shakespeare is bolstered by an imposing cumulative weight of circumstantial evidence that demands serious evaluation.” (11) So claims William Farina in 2006. The case for Edward de Vere, 17th earl of Oxford is over half a century younger than that for Bacon. It came to life when the movement for Bacon began to fade. As Shapiro puts it, “[p]hilosophy and politics were out, Oedipal desires and mourning for dead fathers in.” (149)

In 1920, John Thomas Looney proposed in *‘Shakespeare’ identified in Edward de Vere, the Seventeenth Earl of Oxford* that de Vere instead of Shakespeare had authored the plays and poems. Up to today, de Vere is traded as the likeliest candidate for an alternative Shakespeare. Roland Emmerich made a case for de Vere in his recent blockbuster “Anonymous”.³ What is told, feels much more real than what is written in the history books. For Emmerich, this is the reason why John Orloff’s film script made so much sense to him.⁴ Among those who found their “Shakespeare” in de Vere were several great thinkers like Mark Twain, Sigmund Freud and Henry

³ “Anonymous” was released in the USA, Canada and the United Kingdom 28 October 2011.

⁴ Consult the following URL: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUmwQsfX1wY> for the full ntoi-interview with Emmerich. (Last seen 6 July 2012).

James. Freud especially left his mark on the interpretation of de Vere-as-“Shakespeare”.

Again, Shapiro does a great job in tracing when and why de Vere was first introduced to the discourse as a candidate. Looney was a member of the “Church of Humanity” which was inspired by August Comte’s positivism and his concept of a “religion of humanity” (164-167). *Shakespeare Identified* must be seen as a product of positivism. Sensory experience as the single source of knowledge and empiricism as the only valid method of accumulating knowledge are the basic foundation of this philosophy. Shapiro presents some of Looney’s own commentary in his book (168-169), which reveals Looney’s interpretation of the Shakespearian texts to have been clearly autobiographical (171). When it is experience that creates knowledge, experience must be the basis of Shakespeare’s writings. Michell gives an account of the 18 points Looney came up with to outline the image of “Shakespeare” he derived from the plays and poems. Among this criteria is the notion of genius, the author must stand up to, as well as a kind of mysteriousness and a feeling of not being appreciated enough. The man must be of refined education, have an aristocratic background and be an admirer of Italy (Michell 164-165; Shapiro 172-173). Obviously, Shakespeare did not fit that nineteenth-century image of an author. De Vere, however, seemed to match the description well enough so that Looney could stop looking for his candidate. It is other aristocrats in the first place to pose as competitors for de Vere.

As Looney’s approach required to interpret the Shakespearian plays and poems as drawn from experience and thus as being autobiographical, it was just what would take Freud’s fancy. It brilliantly corresponded to his theory of the unconscious that is confined to the more remote regions of the human mind but pushes to the front in dreams or writings etc. (Hazelton 307-310). De Vere was easily identified, for example, as the author of *Hamlet* – the play in which he, according to Freud, tried to come to terms with the death of his father who had always been inadequate to him (Shapiro 185). The hunt for parallels between de Vere’s life and passages from the plays and poems was declared open. “... Oxfordians since Looney’s time have greatly expanded the case, adding so many new suggestive points of interest that it has grown cumbersome.” (Michell 171) Nothing of that, however, cumulated to proof or even gave an answer to the big problems confronting the Oxford Theory. For one thing, de Vere’s early death in 1604 requires a re-dating of most of the plays, which so far has not convincingly been done. For another thing, nobody has yet succeeded in explaining why de Vere would have needed a front man. If he wanted to remain unrecognised as the author of the plays, he could have published them anonymously, which was commonly done during his time.⁵

⁵ Robert Detobel in the harsh kickback he published as a response to Shapiro tries to give an explanation. He claims Shakespeare was a masquerade for de Vere not a stooge. De Vere needed someone to put in his place as a measure to distance himself from the theatrical world. His involvement with the theatre – which was his passion – had him banned from court, explains De-

In short, the Oxfordian case relies heavily on an interpretation of the plays and poems as autobiographical. The parallels sometimes seem astonishing and therefore convincing. As an example Michell gives the story of Bertram in *All's Well That Ends Well* which seems to be almost identical to de Vere's early life – piquant details included. Yet, it has a 14th century source (170). As stated earlier, Freud and his theory proved quite influential to the Oxfordian reading of Shakespeare's texts. Although there were some who tried to locate hidden messages in the plays and poems in order to link them to their candidate, these endeavours did never reach the same dubious levels as for Bacon – at least not in this respect.⁶ In de Vere's case, it is rather the attempts from the direction of depth psychology that often seem overdone. Freud's psychoanalytical influence on the general direction the movement for de Vere took was already hinted at above. To give but one example, Hazelton, trying to psychologically explain what makes a genius in order to see who fits the description best, maintained that creative writers more often than not are later-born children. This indicator of genius as one among several features points to de Vere rather than Shakespeare. Shakespeare was the first surviving offspring of his parents whereas de Vere was a second-born at least to his father (315).

It is these heavily biased and far-fetched contributions to the Shakespeare Authorship Debate that make it difficult for professional scholars to take it seriously. On the other hand, examples for the dramatic scale which is partially taken on from those adding to the discourse can prove highly interesting for an analysis of the debate as attempted here.

2.3 Christopher Marlowe – the Suffering Genius

“This is the book which proves almost beyond a shadow of a doubt that Christopher Marlowe is the author of the plays and poems attributed to the actor-businessman named William Shakespeare”, promises Calvin Hoffmann on the blurb of “The murder of the man who was ‘Shakespeare’” from 1955. Despite his ambitious aim Marlowe never gained a fellowship comparable to that of Bacon or de Vere. The reason might be that Marlowe according to documentary evidence died in 1593, a few months before Shakespeare's first publication – *Venus and Adonis*. The problem therefore is that while defenders of Bacon or de Vere sometimes like to add some incredible and scandalous conspiracy to their respective

tobel, to which de Vere wanted to return. (257-259). Detobel relies on very scarce evidence relating to general court procedures citing John Davies of Hereford and the French philosopher Philibert de Vienne while dismissing two facts: First, there is a great availability of evidence linking Shakespeare to his work. Second, there is a complete lack of evidence linking de Vere to it.

⁶ See, for example, Thorpe's “Nil Nero Verius”-worldplay – depicted by Michell (180-181) included in a paragraph on the Oxford Anagram (178-184).

theories⁷, defenders of Marlowe do not get around it. They must think of a scenario in which Marlowe survived the night of 30 May 1593 in Deptford in spite of what is in the coroner's report and the examination of the corpse by several jurors. Readers must be convinced of the scenario before they can be convinced of Marlowe's authorship of the Shakespearian plays. D. Maure Wilbert argues: "It is highly likely the stab wound was not fatal to Marlowe but put him into a comatose state from which he would revive hours later, after the sixteen jurors had viewed a bloody and apparently lifeless body." (30)

I am not interested in judging the plausibility or probability of the various candidates. What I am interested in is to look for ways in which candidates are presented to later conclude what kind of image of the Author they correspond to. For this reason I decided to seize on Marlowe here. Indeed, the case for Marlowe is especially interesting because "[i]f he really did survive his own murder there is no limit to what he can be supposed to have done later." (Michell 240) Defenders of Marlowe are given almost complete liberty as they can use their imagination even more freely than the others to create their personal image of the Author.

Marlovians present Marlowe as an ultimate genius. To them Marlowe made influential friends like Sir Francis Walsingham when he worked as an agent for the government. These friends helped him feign his murder when Marlowe had to fear for his life because he was accused of atheism and fell out of favour with the government (Hoffmann 57-68; Blumenfeld 37-39, 212-229). Wilbert even goes so far as to interpret Marlowe's "death" as the moment the genius was shaped: "There is an almost messianic or Christ-like quality about Marlowe, if we allow his anointing by the muses, and the idolatry that belongs to him, not Shakespeare, along with the putative experience of resurrection at Deptford!" (147-148) This perception corresponds to romantic concepts of authorship, as they will be analysed in chapter 2.

Adding to that, Marlovians seem overly ready to reject the inclusion of historical facts to their theory and make abundant use of the liberty they can take with Marlowe's alleged life in exile. For Wilbert, it is obvious that – because the First Folio contained additions, revisions and improvements – Marlowe must have lived until 1623 at least. "... for the master poet-dramatist who first penned them would hardly allow others to retouch his own creations." (101) Such claims reveal a serious lack of knowledge about the early modern world of English theatre, which will be looked at in some detail in chapter 3.

It is particularly amazing that Marlowe-as-"Shakespeare" is presented and imagined in these romantic terms. *The murder of the man who was 'Shakespeare'* – the main work promoting Marlowe – was first published in 1955. One should assume that romantic ideals had faded to dominate images of authorship by then. This, however, seems not to be the case. On the contrary, romantic images of author-

⁷ According to one such theory, Bacon is the rightful heir to the Crown (e.g. Peck, 1-19). Similarly, the Prince Tudor Conspiracy sees de Vere as the secret lover of Queen Elizabeth I – described, for example, by Shapiro (196-197).

ship appear overly dominant, even in the latest film “Anonymus”.⁸ This is why I will argue in chapter 3 that the scholarly discourse concerning questions of authorship has to a large extent bypassed contributors to the Shakespeare Authorship Debate.

Of course, Marlovians as well as Baconians and Oxfordians before them tried to find convincing evidence for their theory within the plays and poems. Image cluster analysis is supposed to reveal the trauma of Deptford, which reappears not only in Shakespearian plays but others as well which consequently must also have been penned by Marlowe (Wilbert, 34-35, 47-49). Marlovians like to cite Thomas Corwin Mendenhall who published one of the first attempts at stylometry in 1901 – a statistical method to analyse author’s styles by a frequency distribution of different word lengths. Mendenhall’s results did not support Bacon-as-“Shakespeare” but amazingly Marlowe (Michell 228-231). Marlovians of course fell on the results (Hoffmann 137-140; Blumenfeld 338). Yet, Michell points out the problem with stylometry that “every stylometrist has a different approach and rejects everyone else’s method.” (230)⁹ In other words, it is in not very reliable.

Furthermore, the poems are considered as clearly autobiographical by Marlovians – a consistent conviction, asserts Blumenfeld (254) – and they obviously do not fit Shakespeare’s biography at all. He never experienced pain and desperation as Marlowe did which is taken to have spawned the sonnets and plays (e.g. 307). Holderness correctly criticises the habit of reading especially the sonnets as autobiographical. “... this is still literature, not life. The drama is real enough but drama is not biography.” (143)

2.4 Alternative “Shakespeare” Biographies – What They Have in Common

It is easy enough to cast doubt on the others, but no theorist has both answered the objections to, and made a positive case for, any particular author of Shakespeare. ... Unless some new, dramatically conclusive evidence turns up, the whole subject looks to be approaching a dead end (Michell 10).

It does, indeed, seem as if everything has been said about the Shakespeare Authorship Debate and every single one of the different candidates. Then, however, new books keep being published. Scott McCrea, a non-professional scholar arguing for Shakespeare-as-“Shakespeare”, promised in the title of his 2005 publication *The case*

⁸ The screenwriter John Orloff has the young Edward de Vere say in “Anonymus”: “My poems are my soul.” (0:24:25-26), which directly refers to the romantic concept of the source of inspiration within the poet. The logical consequence is the veneration of the poet by the audience. The viewers of de Vere’s plays are in raptures through the sheer beauty of his verses and demand for the playwright. It is the illiterate Shakespeare who cannot resist and presents himself as the author (0:34:54-36:08). Everyone wants to touch him as if he was a saint (0:53:06-50).

⁹ Craig comments on Shakespeare’s style as compared to Marlowe’s in Craig/Kinney: „Shakespeare, Computers and the Mystery of Authorship” (6-7).

for *Shakespeare: the end of the authorship question* to finally put an end to the debate. His conclusion then, however, is that there can be no end (217). One must wonder why there can be no end when nobody has to add anything new and when speculations take more and more untenable forms. *Contested Will* would have had the potential to end the debate by reviewing its origins but it only provoked a fierce response by Robert Detobel who immediately summoned all the notable de Vere-defenders to bring them into position against Shapiro.¹⁰ By looking for similarities between the different groups in their argumentation and presentation, I want to take one step closer to answering the question of why there is no prospect of an end. I ask how so many people can look at the same facts and come up with so varying interpretations – always with complete certainty.

Sandra G. L. Schrujfer tries to explain the irreconcilable opposition of the different groups from a psychological perspective and explains mechanisms of group behaviour at work, such as stereotyping, selective listening and the tendency to identify with one group placing it above other relevant groups to achieve personal prestige (127-128). However trivial this might sound, she certainly is right in her conclusion: “Getting acceptance from one’s opponent in this case would be the Stratfordians saying to the Oxfordians or Marlovians for that matter: ‘you are right, we were wrong all along.’ Simply put, this is not going to happen.” (130)

The problem of the incompatibility of the different groups lies within the method used by all “Shakespeare” biographers since the nineteenth century. A candidate is chosen and only later is the evidence at hand arranged around him – speculation and imagination used as adhesive. This method is commented on by Holderness in *Nine Lives*. A tautology is immanent in this kind of thinking: evidence is extracted from the plays and poems and used to identify the Author whose life is then taken to explain their contents – a process which is self-reinforcing. At the beginning of this process stands a person – a professional or non-professional scholar – who has the feeling to know “Shakespeare”. Caroline Spurgeon’s pioneer study *Shakespeare’s imagery and what it tells us* was first published in 1935 but regularly reprinted since then until 2001. She analysed metaphors, similes and analogies she isolated from Shakespeare’s plays to discover the author’s range of experience. The approach rests on the assumption that images reflect what is familiar to an author. Spurgeon contrasts her findings to other poets of Shakespeare’s time. Although one must expect overlaps because of societal and cultural factors, she was able to uncover differences. Yet, she carries her theory a decisive step further by arguing that the imagery reveals the author’s character.

¹⁰ His endeavours were published in 2010 – under the title: *Will – Wunsch und Wirklichkeit: James Shapiros Contested Will*. Detobel shows himself grateful that a professional Shakespeare scholar at least admits to the Shakespeare Authorship Debate and is willing to look into the history of Oxfordianism (302). Yet, he considers Shapiro’s method of researching motives and aims as completely amiss because it is not asked if people had right and reason for their deliberations (303), an accusation made by several contributors of *Will – Wunsch und Wirklichkeit*.

As I have collected and examined these many thousands of images, and have pondered over them the last nine or ten years, there has gradually emerged before my eyes a very definite figure of the man who was the author of them. (200)

This appears to be the crucial point: scholars who have spent their lives with “Shakespeare” develop a very personal image of the man but see it as a universal truth. Like Spurgeon they consider themselves experts of his character, philosophy and worldview. Spurgeon, for example, describes him as gentle and kind, honest, brave and true and attests him a deep understanding of all living things. “He is indeed himself in many ways in character what one can only describe as Christ-like” (207) After having become an expert of “Shakespeare’s” soul and nature, it is nearly impossible to understand the subjectivity of that “knowledge”, which is why many contributors to the Shakespeare Authorship Debate feel so astonished when defenders of other candidates are completely unreceptive towards their argumentation.

The film “Shakespeare in Love” freely creates a “Shakespeare” popular with a today’s audience. This is legitimate because the film simply wants to tell a good story. There are no known details about “Shakespeare’s” personality and private life. Creating their “Shakespeare” is not only what the film does but to a certain degree also what scholars do when they make assumption about him – however reasonable and logical these assumptions might be. In the end “[w]hat we will find ... is an image of ourselves.” (Garber, 2003, 176) The gap between professional and non-professional Shakespeare scholars is widened by the fact that professionals like Shapiro or Holderness are much more aware of this process than non-professionals who hardly ever reflect on it.

In a nutshell, one must admit that the Shakespeare Authorship Debate has indeed reached a dead end. The authors of books arguing for one of the several candidates often are convinced to prove “beyond a reasonable doubt”¹¹, only to find that those who already were convinced share their opinion and those who were not convinced before do not change their minds. Many announce their amazement when people they call “otherwise intelligent” do not accept the candidate they argue for.¹² Everyone accuses everyone else of speculation while speculating themselves.¹³ They all detect all sorts of parallels and clues in the Shakespearian texts

¹¹ E.g. Hoffmann, blurb; Blumenfeld, 1; Malim, 1; Peck, ix-xi.

¹² For example, Felicia Hardison Londré writes in the Introduction to *Farina*: “I have wondered why the minds of otherwise intelligent people often snap shut when it comes to the Shakespeare authorship question.” (*Farina* 2).

¹³ This can be found in almost all contributions to the Shakespeare Authorship Debate. Jolly, for example, writes in the Introduction to *Great Oxford*: “... when ‘orthodox’ scholars speculate, de Vere’s supporters seek to rest their arguments upon documentary evidence.” (8). William D. Rubinstein writing from a historian’s perspective sees himself as above this accusation (53-57). For a typical example, compare Detobel’s critique of Greenblatt and Shapiro (285-287).

that seem to point to their candidate exactly but have to reject parallels and clues found by others indicating other candidates.¹⁴

All this supports one conclusion: the debate has reached a dead end because it has dissolved into something entirely different a long time ago. At the very moment when it was first speculated about “Shakespeare’s” personality, when the first assumptions were being made linking the contents of “Shakespeare’s” plays and poems to the author’s personal experience, this was something one could believe in or not. It was nothing anybody could know for sure. There is no proof. Certainty is derived from belief.

3 The Authorship Debate As a Question of (Religious) Belief

3.1 Theological Origins of the Shakespeare Authorship Debate

Above, I have already declared the Shakespeare Authorship Debate a war of beliefs, and I have underpinned this idea by pointing out that contributions almost never are about facts and almost always about ideas taken for facts by those bringing forward a particular argument. The question is how it could come to that, what factors favoured this development. My analysis includes two levels: On an external level I want to look at the religious origins of the Shakespeare Authorship Debate and at structural aspects of Shakespeare Criticism. On an internal level I want to attend to a contentual layer – namely “Shakespeare’s” deification during the Romantic Age.

In chapter 1 I mentioned the theological origins of the Shakespeare Authorship Debate as suggested by Shapiro or LaPorte because an explanation of the debate’s beginnings cannot go without at least hinting at the matter. Here, I will elaborate on Shapiro’s and LaPorte’s line of thought by which they transfer the concept of *Higher Criticism* to the questioning of Shakespeare. It was Friedrich August Wolf who introduced a new method to the authorship question concerning Homer. In 1795 he published *Prolegomena ad Homerum*. In his work he asked how texts were transmitted over time – a method derived from biblical studies (Shapiro 69-73). His conclusion was that Homer was not the single writer who had authored the works attributed to him but only an imagined entity. LaPorte calls Wolf’s approach reflexive in effect because the Bible as well as Homer offers no clue of who the author might be. Accordingly, Wolf’s hypothesis did not go down well by Christians (LaPorte 616-617). Forty years after *Prolegomena*, David Friedrich Strauss published *The life of Jesus*. Strauss’s bottom line becomes clear when he says that “[i]t is an incontrovertible position of modern criticism that the titles of the Biblical books represent nothing more than the design of their author, or the opinion of Jewish and Christian antiquity respecting their origin.” (part 1 56-57 cit.

¹⁴ E.g. Hoffmann, 203-232; Detobel, 81-100; Londré (see foreword to Farina), 1-5.

from LaPorte 617) This idea was of explosive nature especially when applied to the New Testament, which Strauss did not hesitate to do. According to LaPorte's thesis the emergence of the Shakespeare question was from now on unavoidable in the "mid-Victorian religious atmosphere" (LaPorte 617). Similarly, Shapiro claims: "In such a climate, it was only a matter of time before someone would try to do to Shakespeare what Strauss had done to Jesus." (76) What followed was the publication of Schmucker's *Historic doubts concerning Shakespeare*.

Obviously, this can only be fully understood in the light of the meaning Shakespeare had at that time. It can only be understood in the light of Shakespeare's divinity. That is why I will now leave the external level before coming back to it at the end of the chapter. For now, I deem it necessary to take a look at the reception of Shakespeare in the decades after his death. "Less than an author in the 1660s", writes Michael Dobson, "Shakespeare was by the 1760s something more than an author" (185). Rather than having been born a genius, Shakespeare was made a genius. I will try and outline when and how his apotheosis occurred.

3.2 Shakespeare's Apotheosis

3.2.1 *From Man to Entity – Editing Shakespeare*

Above, I quite freely referred to "Shakespeare"-as-genius or -as-divinity. One could criticise that a clearer distinction should be drawn between the two concepts. I will not do that here at length. Both seeing "Shakespeare"-as-god or -as-genius must be viewed as symptomatic of one and the same tendency: "Shakespeare" is not seen as part of the world he lived in but as standing above it. Thus, the two concepts are interrelated. To avoid confusions, I suggest that *genius* is used more generally in terms of the literary high esteem "Shakespeare" is praised with, and the theological diction more specifically to refer to the personality cult around "Shakespeare" in the nascent Romantic Period.

"[It] seems we want to make Shakespeare less like a man, and more like a kind of god", concludes Marjorie Garber her brief reflections on the Shakespeare Authorship Debate (2004, 21). I want to ask why that is. Gary Taylor explains that "Shakespeare" was actually forgotten after his death several years before he was "reinvented". "Almost no publication, almost no performance, almost no biography, almost no criticism: we might take 1659 as the nadir of Shakespeare's posthumous history." (12) It was only with the Restoration that "Shakespeare" reappeared on the scene. With the return of Charles II a political amnesia spread. The Interregnum with all statutes passed during those years was feigned to never have taken place. Shakespeare and Jonson happened to be the preferred readings of Charles I and "returned from exile with Charles II" (Taylor 13). They both underwent their own literary restoration (10-13).

Taylor's thesis of that close a connection between a political and literary restoration is not fact. Yet, Shakespeare certainly did reappear from oblivion although he did not necessarily match Restoration tastes, his language being too loaded (36). Still, he remained in the repertoire. Restoration audiences tended to interpret plays in terms of politics and societal circumstances. Many Shakespearian plays had a potential in this field. The obvious solution was adaptations. It was only these revised versions of Shakespearian plays that were now and again performed on the Restoration stages (Dobson 4).¹⁵ Meanwhile and independently from that, "Shakespeare's" reputation was gradually improved upon and established. The process that contributed to this development was the fading interest of the royalty in the theatre from Charles II to George I. Actors had to find new audiences in the middle classes, which gained them the disdain of the upper classes. The accusation of cultural decline accompanied the theatre's return to the public (Taylor 61-62). Admiration of "Shakespeare" was possible only because he was subject to a gradual shift from 'stage to page'.¹⁶

Alexander Pope, in his 1725 edition of Shakespeare, commented on the Shakespearian texts by highlighting paragraphs he considered especially pure and beautiful. This shows that the plays and poems were now actually meant to be read instead of be viewed in performance. What Pope did, however, was more than to simply put emphasis on the passages he valued highest. He also identified moral or textual failures within the texts and declared them undesirable side effects owed to "Shakespeare's" close connections to the public stage (Dobson 129-130; Taylor 82-83). It was "the stage that was to blame for obscuring Shakespeare's genius." (Taylor 83) Pope's opinion is related to the method he used for his Shakespeare edition, which he must be credited for. Habitually, former editors of Shakespeare had simply relied on the most recent editions, which had been altered severely from the First up to the Forth Folio. Pope, however, collected all the early Quarto editions he could lay his hands on, compared text passages and restored words, phrases and passages he assumed to be truly "Shakespeare" (ibid.). "Pope's edition reveals more clearly than any other Augustan publication the connection between the desire to rescue Shakespeare from the theatre in the interests of print culture and the urge to delete his plays' lapses into vulgarity." (Dobson 129)

Pope thereby contributed to a process that can be called an abstraction of "Shakespeare" from his texts that were in circulation but felt to have been corrupted by their usage in the theatre.¹⁷ After the Restoration, "Shakespeare" was

¹⁵ For a more detailed description of the repertoire of the Restoration stage see, for example, Taylor (20-30).

¹⁶ The shift 'from stage to page' and in what way it affected Shakespeare criticism and the reception of Shakespeare is, for example, dealt with by Tiffany Stern in "Making Shakespeare: from Stage to Page".

¹⁷ Compare Taylor (74-87) for a detailed analysis of Nicholas Rowe's 1709 edition of Shakespeare – prefaced by the first attempt of a Shakespeare biography – which kept to theatrical conventions concerning the treatment of texts. Rowe, thus, derived authenticity from theatrical tradition while Pope relied on principles associated with the development of books during the Augustan Age.

considered part of the past that was seen as present again and that was enacted as such. “Shakespeare” gained a conservative importance and meaning. At the end of the eighteenth century, this obtained new relevance when the French Revolution let fears of revolution increase in England. Famous Shakespeare editors like Edmond Malone – the first to include the poems as well as the plays in his Shakespeare edition – continued the pursuit for documentary authenticity because Shakespeare seemed to belong to exactly the past they wanted to conserve and protect (Taylor 131-133).¹⁸

De Grazia suggests that Malone’s method of comparing text passages with what Shakespeare had written elsewhere in order to recover their true meaning and wording implies that Malone looked for answers and for truth within “Shakespeare” instead of language (204-205). In accordance with the abstraction of “Shakespeare” from his texts, this must be hold as an important step to create “Shakespeare”-as-abstract entity, detached from the playwright of around 1600. Even if Shakespeare was dead, this entity could still be consulted and would yield answers. The process of splitting Shakespeare in two is completed here. On the one hand, there is the playwright who lived and worked around 1600 in a world strange to following generations and up to a certain degree always inaccessible for scholars of later centuries. On the other hand, there is the entity “Shakespeare”, the person one knows, the person one has such a clear image of in one’s head. In a way, of course, this separation always has existed. Yet, with the abstraction of Shakespeare’s plays from the theatre and then the abstraction of “Shakespeare” from his texts in circulation, the distinction was reinforced. Marjorie Garber in this context speaks of “Shakespeare”-as-two playwrights: the playwright of then and the playwright of now (2004, 28). The differentiation does not seem far-reaching enough, though. The process that led from Shakespeare to “Shakespeare” is more complex than is reflected by a distinction like that. The process took a playwright and yielded an author.¹⁹ It took a historic person and yielded a universal entity. It took a man and yielded a god. For that reason, I prefer the distinction between Shakespeare-as-historic figure, and “Shakespeare”-as-framework filled with the respective projections of those trying to establish a clear picture of him.

At this point, however, I have to take a step back. Even if Malone unknowingly contributed to establishing “Shakespeare”-as-entity, he did not make him a god. Although, Malone’s inclusion of the sonnets in his Shakespeare edition furthered the shift from a dominant image of “Shakespeare”-as-public dramatist to “Shakespeare”-as-private poet, which might be considered essential for the Romanticists veneration of “Shakespeare” (Taylor 156), it was not quite enough. As necessary as the distancing of “Shakespeare” from the theatre had been to allow

¹⁸ For a more detailed analysis of this process and the development of the concept of authenticity see: Margreta de Grazia, 49-93.

¹⁹ This will be of concern in chapter 3.

for his admiration, so necessary was the marketing of “Shakespeare” within the theatre for his apotheosis.

3.2.2 *From Entity to God – Garrick’s Product*

As mentioned above, plays by Shakespeare did not belong to those that were staged often during the eighteenth century (Cunningham 20-22). While masquerades and farces featured prominently in the theatre repertoires, tragedies were only rarely put on stage. Cunningham points out, however, that under the tragedies that were performed Shakespeare’s outnumbered those of other playwrights (21). In the second half of the eighteenth century, theatres began to prosper again. The country achieved new wealth and military power. The population was constantly growing (Taylor 115). “Shakespeare” benefitted from the fact that hardly any new tragedies came forth at the time and even most comedies had a very short lifespan so that Drury Lane and Covent Garden in London had to rely on successes of the past (Taylor 115-116; Cunningham 20-21). Apart from that, Shakespeare’s tragedies had something else to offer: “A role is the meeting place for an actor and a play; if the actor triumphs so does the play.” (Taylor 22) Several of the Shakespearian plays provide strong roles for actors. Suddenly, the fate of “Shakespeare” was closely linked to that of a young actor with the name of David Garrick.

Garrick first became known or even famous for his embodiment of Shakespeare’s main character Richard III (Cunningham 4). His style of acting thereby differed greatly from what were the usual practices at the time. In an elocutionary conception of acting, the art of conveying the idea of an emotion was generally valued highest. Garrick, however, dismissed the requirement of dignity on stage instead using his whole body to convey deep inner passions (Woo 22-23).

He departed from the entire mode of using the voice as primary instrument of stage communication, caring little for maintaining the customary graces of form and dignity, and instead allowing his conception of the character to more fully inhabit his body (25).

It seems Garrick had found a kind of gap in the market and made full use of promoting his product “Shakespeare”.

As explained above, no “authorised” version of Shakespeare’s plays existed in the eighteenth century. Theatre-goers only knew “Shakespeare”-as-great-author that could still be improved (Garber, 2004, 12) or they were not even aware that the plays put on stage were adapted versions. Garrick now claimed to retrieve the “authentic Shakespeare”, to have his plays performed as they had been written by him (Cunningham 7-9). His efforts are judged ambiguously, though. “Whereas

Stone²⁰ had championed a Garrick intent upon driving his theatre ever closer to textual fidelity to Shakespeare, Vickers²¹ accuses Garrick of lacking the courage and the inclination to revive Shakespeare as written.” (Cunningham, 10). Indeed, Garrick did continue “to shorten, adjust and re-present, in both small and large ways, his idol’s plays.” (42)²². Yet, Garrick restored some text passages and more importantly several characters who had been deleted in other adaptations (Vickers, 1989, 212-231; Cunningham 43-75).

Woo, in her analysis of Garrick’s contribution to the making of “Shakespeare”, testifies he had an “acute sense of what his society would and would not tolerate.” (31). Cunningham somewhat more ironically concludes:

Rather than literal adherence to any printed text or indeed to any absolute principles of alteration, the best service that Shakespeare’s self-selected high priest believed he could offer to his idol was to bring forward his plays in forms acceptable to contemporary audiences (75).

When Cunningham almost mockingly dubs Garrick “Shakespeare’s self-selected high priest”, she seizes on the designation of Garrick as “Shakespeare’s priest” in his own lifetime. This “status” he did not just achieve by performing his new Shakespeare adaptations. His clever marketing catapulted “Shakespeare” into the foreground. While promoting Shakespeare, Garrick also promoted himself-as-“Shakespeare”. Garrick drew audiences to the theatre by introducing new stage machinations and thus more “action” to the stage, which made “Shakespeare” more accessible for middle class audiences. He also distributed paintings and pamphlets, in which he presented himself as “Shakespeare”-promoter in self-mocking ways (Woo, 28-30). In 1755 Garrick had a temple erected in his own garden on the banks of the River Thames at Hampton which was devoted to Shakespeare. He himself posed for the statue (Woo, 41; Cunningham, 5). Briefly speaking, his approach was multimedia.

Furthermore, Garrick was the first who had the name of “Shakespeare”-as-author put on the playbills (35). However minor this might seem, it played its part in tracing the plays put on stage to “Shakespeare” and in tracing “Shakespeare” to his roots. Garrick’s enactment of “Shakespeare” reached a climax in 1769 when he was approached by leaders of the town of Stratford-upon-Avon with the request to fund a Shakespeare statue to stand in the Town Hall. Garrick had the idea to cele-

²⁰ George Winchester Stone made Garrick the champion of his doctoral thesis “Garrick’s treatment of Shakespeare’s plays and his influence upon the changed attitude of Shakespearean criticism during the eighteenth century”.

²¹ Brian Vickers is one of those making a case against Garrick: “Shakespearean adaptations: the tyranny of the audience”, in *Returning to Shakespeare*: 212-233.

²² For an example of the kind of alterations Garrick had Shakespeare’s plays subjected to see, for example, Cunningham (63-75).

brate “Shakespeare’s” birthday with a Jubilee in the very town his idol had been born in (Woo, 32-35). In the course of the festivities a procession of Shakespeare characters went through Stratford, plays were performed – notably none of Shakespeare’s – and Garrick himself presented a poem he had written in praise of “Shakespeare” (Cunningham 106-112). For Garber, this re-creation of Stratford-upon-Avon as “Shakespeare’s” birthplace was a cultural event that celebrated the author rather than his plays and thus is indicative of the personality cult that was created (2004, 16). Possibly due to bad weather conditions the Shakespeare Jubilee was not as great a success as organizers must have hoped for. In the aftermath, however, a new Shakespeare industry developed with Garrick as driving force. He wrote a play about the Jubilee that was performed at Drury Lane and was quite popular with the audiences (Woo 34).

This clearly shows that “Shakespeare” by then had achieved a status independent from his creations. Garrick’s play *The Jubilee* looks like a comment on the cult he himself had sparked. He can be called the first bardolator of Shakespeare²³, but he took others with him. In *Shakespeare’s Garland* of 1770 a song appeared in praise of the Mulberry Tree, supposedly planted by Shakespeare in Stratford. The personality cult gained momentum. All kinds of items were sold that were allegedly carved from the wood of the Mulberry Tree (Woo 32-38). The fan was established as a consumer who wanted to obtain a piece of “Shakespeare”, even if his plays were still only tolerated as adaptations.

“Those who believe in the high and serious calling of literary criticism will be disappointed that so many intelligent men and women who cared about Shakespeare and the drama failed to stop the ‘new-modelling’ of his plays”, assumes Vickers (1989, 229). This, however, seems somewhat beside the point. Today’s focus on authenticity, the focus on the very words “Shakespeare” had committed to paper only developed after his deification. At the end of the eighteenth century the Shakespearian plays became more acceptable although they were still put on stage in adaptations. “Shakespeare” was given national importance.²⁴ For England, the uprising trading nation, “Shakespeare” became a cultural export (Taylor 123).

The Shakespeare of the mid-eighteenth century is imagined and rewritten as an author at once domestic, national, and moral, and in all of these aspects, which spectacularly converge on the Jubilee, he is rapidly escaping from the stage altogether (Dobson 186).

²³ “Bardolatry” refers to the worshipping of Shakespeare and was as a term introduced by George Bernhard Shaw. Shaw invents the term “bardolatry” to sneer at the alleged Shakespeare Worship of Garrick, Cibbers and the like, whose representations of the plays he calls “spurious and silly”. “So much for Bardolatry!” (718).

²⁴ See Dobson for an analysis of „The Making of the National Poet” and Celestine Woo for a more specific approach dealing with John Philip Kemble and his enactment of “Shakespeare”-as-national poet in the aftermaths of Garrick (49-85).

Garrick, who felt he had been called to mediate between “Shakespeare’s” actual words and the people, drew upon the mystery surrounding Shakespeare and the abstraction of Shakespeare from his plays and poems. He made “Shakespeare” his product of worship. The story of “Shakespeare”-as-product was so great a success because the abstractness of “Shakespeare” enriched by a sense of mystery made it easy for people to believe in the product (Woo 38). It was a god-like status that had been produced for “Shakespeare” and “Shakespeare” had obtained an independent existence when Garrick died in 1779.

The two processes described here can be seen as separate developments but they interact in certain aspects. On the one hand, there is the interpretation of the Shakespearian texts as poetic rather than dramatic – for example by Pope – and the abstraction of “Shakespeare” especially by Malone in Pope’s tradition. Within the theatre this developing abstractness was used by Garrick for promoting “Shakespeare” and for making him an idol of worship. Later, it served to give the entity Malone established a godlike, omniscient meaning.

This image of “Shakespeare” prospered within the Romanticist Movement. Taylor’s criticism is doubtlessly justified: “most literary critics do not ask themselves why Shakespeare stayed on top during the Romantic period, because they assume that he belongs on top, and they assume too that continuity is normal.” (147) All those who question Shakespeare’s authorship because they assume his life does not fit their image of genius are not aware of one fact: Shakespeare was not born a genius. He was made one long after his death. In “Shakespeare in Love” Joseph Fiennes presents the viewer an image of the poet – alone in his study, equipped with quill and parchment, his fingers stained with ink – that corresponds to notions of authorship formed during the Romantic era – solitude, pensiveness, reflectiveness. These still seem prominent with contributors to the Shakespeare Authorship Debate – independent of the name and identity they assign to the figure at the desk.

3.3 Believing in “Shakespeare” – A Structural Analysis of the Debate

After Shakespeare had been made divine, he also became more vulnerable. Divinity is closely related to faith, and faith to doubt. “Shakespeare’s” apotheosis was followed by his idealization in the Romantic Age. In 1848, Schmucker’s attack *Historic Doubts* was published. The deification of Shakespeare must be considered vital for the Shakespeare Authorship Debate and leads me back to the external level of my analysis.

The theological origins of the Debate as suggested by Shapiro and LaPorte were pointed out above. They are reflected in the respective labelling of Stratfordians as *Orthodox* and of anti-Stratfordians as *Heretics*, which is done by many contributors to the Debate. Shakespeare of Stratford and Jesus of Nazareth both are historic figures about whose lives only little is known. Although Shakespeare’s life is much better documented than that of most of his contemporary writers, the

obtainable information concerns his birth and marriage and otherwise his business life. There are few guidelines for establishing an image of his character and personal life. Both Shakespeare and Jesus underwent an abstraction from their lives and from their works that is essential for the cult that developed around their personalities. The notion of divinity or sacredness even extends to things they are said to have touched which automatically turn into relics. In the same way that pieces of Jesus' cross were sold and revered as sacred, pieces of "Shakespeare's" Mulberry Tree were sold and revered as sacred (Woo 34-35).

Péter Dávidházi interprets The Shakespeare Jubilee as a religious event. Even today do the recurring birthday celebrations of the Bard evoke ideas of religious celebrations. The official Shakespeare's Birthday website advertises:

Every year a unique event takes place in Stratford-upon-Avon to mark the birth of the world's greatest playwright. ... The birthday weekend brings together performers, artists, the local community and ambassadors from around the world in a vibrant celebration of the life and works of William Shakespeare. During the two day event, the town's streets overflow with music, pageantry and drama...²⁵

Today, the event is highly commercialized but, as Woo assumes, David Garrick was already well aware of the "marketing possibilities of Shakespearian religiosity" (35): He was the first to erect "Shakespeare" a temple. He was "Shakespeare's" priest. He initiated the Shakespeare worship and Bardolatry imitated Christianity. LaPorte even goes so far as to see Bardolatry and Christianity as strongly connected by an interlacing of religious and literary discourses that goes beyond analogy and of which the Shakespeare Authorship Debate is the most prominent consequence (609). To break it down, it can be hold that doubts concerning the historic Shakespeare are related to doubts concerning the historic Jesus.

There is, however, one major difference between the two: never ever has an alternative Jesus been proposed. The reason might be that Strauss stripped Jesus of his divinity and left a person who still had interesting things to say. Schmucker – however unwillingly and however unjustified – stripped Shakespeare of his authorship and left a person with nothing but austere business transactions. Doubts only started to rise when "Shakespeare" was split in two – the historic person and the divine poet. The nineteenth century first created doubts concerning Shakespeare and then started looking for a more suitable author. "The key point to grasp about all these contenders is that their names – every one of them – only entered the frame *after* the apotheosis of Shakespeare from accomplished dramatist to god of our idolatry." (Bate 106, highlighting in original). None of the idealised "Shakespeares" that were built from the nineteenth century readings of the plays and

²⁵ <http://www.shakespearesbirthday.org.uk/> (last seen: 6 July 2012).

poems could be proven to have written them. Nobody could claim to know. They were embodiments of a “Shakespeare” one could believe in.

Orthodoxy and *Heresy* are terms that have no place within a serious debate. They are symptomatic, though, for the moment when the Debate ceases to be a debate and becomes a war of beliefs instead. This is the reason why the debate will not be solved one way or another. Belief or faith is seldom open to reasoning.

4 The Authorship Debate As a Question of Authorship

4.1 Changing Conceptions of Authorship

4.1.1 *The Birth of the Genius*

To most contributors to the Shakespeare Authorship Debate the Shakespearian plays and poems were written by a genius. Their interpretation of “Shakespeare”-as-genius has far-reaching consequences. Indeed, the Shakespeare Authorship Debate would not exist without it. This is because of what scholars – as analysed in chapter 1 – interested in “Shakespeare” do: they look at what is left of him and find it curious because within their understanding of authorship, writing processes and the concept of literary genius, the documentary evidence and the poetry do not fit together. Obviously, what should be done by them is understand that William Shakespeare of Stratford lived in a world different from their own. It must not be assumed that it is obvious what he thought, what influenced his behaviour and what made sense to him.

In the preceding chapter it was demonstrated that “Shakespeare” always is and always was imagined. Nobody knows the real Shakespeare, “Shakespeare”-as-himself. “Every age creates its own Shakespeare.” (Garber, 2004, 3). Every biographer imagines and thus invents their own Shakespeare. It seems therefore impossible to find out who the “real Shakespeare” was. The question that must be answered at this point is why it matters who he was anyway. The Shakespeare Authorship Debate is the best of indicators that it does matter. It is the identity of the Author that is questioned. The Author seems to be an entity existing on its own – waiting to be assigned a name, a life and a personality.

In order to find an answer to why it matters who “Shakespeare” was, I will analyse conceptions of authorship with regard to the influence they have on the image of “Shakespeare”. Yet, I will also take into account conceptions of authorship that interestingly do not seem to sway that image. Any survey of the developing ideas about authorship is at risk of interpreting the past as a series of events that inevitably lead to the present. Scholars who write a history of ideas are always confronted with this problem, which is why it is a necessity to reflect on it within any work concerned with abstract notions subject to transformation. When I

sketch a development here that seems more linear in nature, I justify that with my focus on “Shakespeare”. Still, the Author is no natural concept, even though most contributors to the Shakespeare Authorship Debate use the term as taken for granted.

The conception of authorship is closely related to that of originality and truth. Truth, thereby, gives authority. Christian culture found truth in God. This truth was approachable chiefly through *the word*. Christian culture, therefore, brought together notions of inspiration and autonomous truth in that authority for inspiration was given by God (Burke, 2006, 7).²⁶ For the further development of the literary author, Burke emphasises the importance of a shift within Bible interpretation. Instead of an allegorical (divinely-authored) conception of authorship a literary (humanly-authored) one became prevalent (ibd.). This is one example for the interlacing of religious and literary discourses that LaPorte maintains.

Edward Young was the first who attempted in “Conjectures on original composition“, which was published in 1759, to dissociate the source of inspiration from God and place it within the subjective self instead. This entailed a notion of originality as innate that had not existed before. Because of his rejection of imitating classicism and his promotion of the superiority of genius, Edward Young might be discerned as a pioneer of Romanticism (Burke, 2006, 8). “In Romantic literature, we see the clear emergence of a central emphasis upon the ‘imaginative genius’ of the poet.” (Moore/Strachan 2). Creative imagination is the impulse that enables a poet to create art without imitating the outside world (ibd.). The Romantic Age must be seen as one of the peak moments in the discourse of authorship when conceptions of authorship were renegotiated. Therefore, it is difficult to bring the different ideas down to a common denominator. The first generation of Romantics had to emancipate themselves from their neo-classical predecessors (123). Wordsworth heavily criticised the ‘poetic diction’ in its stead demanding a language that was natural, more spontaneous, and supposed to come straight from the heart (125). Shakespeare was nothing of that. Still, he was seen as the greatest of poets to express human passions and nature. John Keats found in “Shakespeare” an embodiment of his conception of *negative capability*. “Keats’s brand of poet, who identifies empathetically with other people’s natures and beings, is a poetic chameleon with ‘no identity’ and ‘no self’ of its own.” (155) “Shakespeare” excelled in *negative capability* because Keats found that no personal attitudes were reflected in the plays. Instead, it seems to be something outside of him that is represented in his texts, something that surpasses his individuality. Keats’s concept of *negative capability* stands in opposition to Wordsworth’s more self-centred notion of

²⁶ Seán Burke in his portrayal of *Authorship : from Plato to the postmodern* distinguishes between two main sources of authority within conceptions of authorship: Literature can either be derived from an inspirational or from an imitative discourse. Inspiration includes the notion of “otherness” by which the author is set apart from the common everyone, while at the same time denying him any originating power. Imitation sees a subjective individual at work reproducing an objective reality, which means the author is a kind of expert answering to or commenting on the established system (5-7).

poetic production, which Keats critically refers to as Wordsworth's 'egotistical sublime'.²⁷ Poets of the first and second generation, however, are one on the idea of the 'transcendent genius' as author. Moore and Strachan stress selfhood as the central preoccupation of Romanticism (3). "Shakespeare" was now interpreted as the "archetypal genius" (Bennett 20) Even if the Romantic Era was none that produced great drama itself, interest in drama persevered (Moore/Strachan 169-172). For Romanticist notions of literature, Shakespeare's plays, however, rather seemed fit to be enjoyed before the inner eye. Performance on the stage would reduce "Shakespeare's" verbal power and beauty (Moore/Strachan 170-171). In this conception of the Shakespearian texts "Shakespeare constitutes the model of the Romantic author as transcendent genius." (Bennett 20)

The source of imagination continued to be debated, though. As Burke goes on to explain, Stéphane Mallarmé was the first to state that the poetic origins are to be found in the outside world. Thus, he denied all ideas that saw the poetic origins in the imagination or the unconscious, the inner world of the poet so to say (Burke, 2006, 9). His approach was pointing the way ahead to the twentieth century.

4.1.2 *The Death of the Author*

That it is not the conscious subject that rules but the linguistic unconscious was an insight of the twentieth century. It was in the first place Claude Lévi-Strauss and Jacques Lacan – based on Saussure's structuralism – who made language the crucial point of intellectual thought. What they did was apply linguistic structures to phenomena which had formerly been considered "natural" and had never really been called into question (Burke, 2008, 12-13). One concept that quite famously came under scrutiny was that of the author.

According to Burke, it was at the juncture of phenomenology and structuralism that a "far-ranging form of anti-subjectivism" was produced (13). The first means, in Edmund Husserl's conception, to systematically study structures of consciousness thus opening up new layers of reflectiveness. The second, being a theoretical paradigm which was borrowed for application in a diverse range of scholarly fields, places truth in language which can only be understood in relational terms. Consequently, one could conclude that it is the structural system of relationships that is the source of inspiration but not the poet. Lacan and Lévi-Strauss stressed the importance of the 'unconscious infrastructure' as determining every thought and action. In their theories the "conscious subject" is replaced by the "linguistic unconscious". Burke cites Lévi-Strauss: "the goal of the human sciences is not to constitute man, but to dissolve him." (cit. from Burke 13) This paved the way for Deconstruction.

²⁷ For a more detailed description of Keats's negative capability and how Shakespeare fits into it, see Moore/Strachan (153-157).

After Burke, these developments were the fertile ground for the theories of the mid-twentieth century. Yet, in relation to the interpretation of authorship, he argues that these new theories were more than extensions of the arisen opposition towards the Author for the benefit of a focusing on literature itself. New Criticism interpreted literature as a “self-contained aesthetic object”, whereby Burke sees this anti-authorialism simply as a reaction to the preceding biographical positivism, where the Author was treated as key to understanding a text. (15) “[T]he history of literary criticism had for the most part been the history of the glorification of the author.” (24) Jacques Derrida mitigated this relationship by explaining that what is meant by a text, what is the Author’s intention is only a subset of what is written. Burke, however, points out the difficulty of determining where intentions end, where the exact moment of deconstruction can be located (Burke, 2006, 68-69). It is Roland Barthes who finally “reaches the zero-degree of the impersonalising tradition through negatively maintaining the analogy of Author and Divinity to argue that the death of the latter implies the removal of the former.” (69)

This is where it all comes together: the interlacing of religious and literary discourses, the analogies of Bardolatry and Christianity, and “Shakespeare”. “Shakespeare” was made an Author and a god. William Shakespeare of Stratford died in 1616. “Shakespeare” was recreated in the eighteenth century as God and since lived as the Author. When Barthes declared the death of the author after God had already been declared dead by Friedrich Nietzsche, it would have been a logical consequence if “Shakespeare” had finally ceased to be a matter of interest. Yet, he is as proves the wave of Shakespeare biographies and the success of films like “Shakespeare in Love” and “Anonymous” very much alive until this very day.

In order to comprehend this phenomenon, it is necessary to make tangible what exactly it was that made Barthes declare the ‘death of the author’. For Barthes, the author exists – if at all – in the very instance of writing but is then nothing more than the figure produced by using *I*. He is, thus, not real in his existence. “linguistically, the author is nothing but the one who writes, just as *I* is nothing but the one who says *I*.” (Barthes 122-123). What Barthes targets is not the author – as the person by whom a given text is written. It is the Author as an institution of critical inquiry that he wants abolished. The reason for this is the practice of critically approaching a text with the idea that each text can be assigned exactly one possible interpretation. In lieu of God, it is now the Author who gives authority to the one reading of his text. Truth is found in him. Truth is found in “Shakespeare”. Barthes’s criticism is that this prevents other or new interpretations thereby limiting the possibilities of a text. Instead, it is the reader who produces the text. The Reader is no individual subject, though, but an abstract ideal type of reader. Everyone will see and understand certain aspects of a text, never all of them and probably not the same as anybody else. “[T]he unity of a text is not in its origin but in its destination, but this destination can no longer be personal: (...) [the reader] is only that *someone* who holds collected into one and the same field all of the traces from which writing is constituted.” (124, highlighting in original) The

abolition of the author means to free language from its representational status (Burke, 2008, 41-42). For “Mallarmé, as for us, it is language which speaks, not the author” (Barthes 122).

In a sense, this implies that reading is like peering through a keyhole but there is no author who could unlock the door. The Author loses his key role. Instead, the readers create sense from what they see by themselves. As Burke points out, the death of the Author resembles the death of God because both include a dismissal of belief in authority (Burke, 2008, 21).

In the wake of Barthes, Michel Foucault asked *What is an author?*. In his essay he sees the author as a constructed social position. The author is firmly placed within the system of discourse that created him. “The author-function is ... characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society.” (Foucault 148) The possibility or even danger of a text transgressing the system’s boundaries becomes more and more inherent to literature. The author is in this sense a category invented to protect the system. The embedding of the author into the system thereby works through the fixation of authors’ rights. “Foucault’s bracing conjunction of modern literary authorship with copyright law has done much to energize the historiography of authorship.” (Knapp 10) Foucault unmasks the term “author” as a historical mechanism of suppression. His conclusion therefore is that it should not matter at all who is speaking within a given text (Burke, 2008, 89). Still, it is the name of the author that holds a body of texts together and gives them a meaning. The name of the author is different to any other name in that it is related to the author function.

If I discover that Shakespeare was not born in the house that we visit today, this is a modification which, obviously, will not alter the functioning of the author’s name. But if we proved that Shakespeare did not write those sonnets which pass for his, that would constitute a significant change and affect the manner in which the author’s name functions (Foucault 146).

For Foucault the author has long been disappeared. They only exist as servant to their text – not their creator.

What consequences does this have for the treatment of Shakespeare? Brooks reflects on “Shakespeare” as having achieved an iconic status as the Author, as having become a symbol of modern ideas of Authorship (2). He does mention Barthes and Foucault (3-4) like several of the recent works on “Shakespeare” do. In none of them is “Shakespeare”-as-the Author dethroned, though. Knapp brings up Barthes’s theory in “Shakespeare only” (9) to conclude later that anti-Bardolatry blinds scholars to the fact that Shakespeare indeed was special (19).

When the Author is dead, however, “Shakespeare” as embodiment of the Author finally should be dead. Yet, it has been pointed out that none of the theories or developments of the twentieth century seems to have had a lasting impact on the

image of “Shakespeare”-as-the Author. Burke states that the problem with the death of the author is that the author-as-god had to be created first before he could be destroyed (25). Even after his proclaimed death, “the author lives on within and without theory.” (165) Burke proceeds to explain that the absence of the author only has an “intra-critical” meaning. “The decision as to whether we read a text with or without an author remains an act of critical choice governed by the protocols of a certain way of reading rather than any ‘truth of writing’.” (169) The absence of the author feels unnatural because an absence is created where an idea already exists (165).

Deconstruction is carried on a meta-level when it comes to the weird situation that not only the author is an imagined category but also is his absence an imagined one. Burke’s analysis is applicable to “Shakespeare”-as-the Author. Even if “Shakespeare” was given his status long after his death, it is now nearly impossible to imagine him without it. The canonization of his texts and the readings of his texts have to a great extent been influenced by his new status (Dobson 184-185). Theories concerning authorship may have progressed but the romantic picture of the genius-author creating from free imagination has prevailed as a powerful force within heads. “In spite of postmodernist scepticism, we conceive, in our still romantic way, of all art of any worth as being the privileged expression of the unlimited creative imagination of the individual artist.” (Kernan 169) This is the point where the separation of professional scholars and non-professional scholars within the Shakespeare Authorship Debate takes effect.

4.1.3 Specialist versus Amateur – Rivalling Images of the Author

The deconstruction of the Shakespeare myth (Holderness, 2010, 105-106) has consequences for professional Shakespeare studies. Even if it is difficult to “suppress the instinct to think of Shakespeare as unique and supreme[, we] need to return to the age before Bardolatry and recover the perceptions of Shakespeare’s own time.” (Bate 106-107) The awareness that it is the reading of a text that to a large degree constructs its meaning seems to distance scholars from “Shakespeare”. This awareness, on the other hand, enables them to write a history of the reception of “Shakespeare”. Tracking down the circumstances of life in Shakespeare’s own time, how he might have been perceived in his own time, might be what takes scholars closest to “Shakespeare” as they can get.

This awareness seems to be missing in most of the works by non-professional Shakespeare scholars, though. Answers given to the question why it actually matters who wrote the plays often sound similar. Farina writes: “To know more about a writer’s life is to have a better understanding and appreciation for the writer’s work – plain common sense, one would think.” (13) For Calvin Hoffman as well it is not a question of difference when it comes to knowing the author’s identity but a question of better understanding (x). “The personality of the author of the plays and poems is inescapably linked to the creations themselves. ... it is nonsense to

believe one can, at the same time, admire merely what has been written and ignore the author.” (ix-x) Freud as an Oxfordian also tried to explain why one bothers about the author’s identity. It is that “we desire to bring ourselves nearer to such a man in a human way as well.” (cit. from Hazelton 307)

There is a divide obvious in the conception of authorship and the approach to texts between professional and non-professional Shakespeare scholars. It is especially problematic that most non-professionals base their contemplations on an already-mentioned tautology. In trying to decode what the author meant with his text, they want to find hints to his identity, which they then use for a better understanding of the text. Because the distribution of academics and non-professionals is very uneven within the camps of *Orthodoxy* and *Heresy* (Schruijer 135; Rubinstein 41-42), power relations are asymmetric. Taylor drastically subsumes: “The Baconians were all amateurs writing for amateurs against specialists.” (220) Even if this condensation was exaggerated, the high proportion of non-professional scholars defending alternative candidates reinforces their perception of having to deal with a conspiracy. They run against the wall of academics who they perceive make up the established system which tries to choke off all dissident thinking out of self-protection (Rubinstein 44-45) “Non-Stratfordians can be seen as heretics as they challenge the establishment and the establishment feels threatened”, concludes Schruijer (138). Tom Hunter – one of the contributors to Detobel’s *Will – Wunsch und Wirklichkeit* – compares doubts about “Shakespeare” with Galilei’s doubts about the sun circling the earth. In the same way as Galilei encountered the massive and impenetrable resistance of the Church that made him repeal his claims, Anti-Stratfordians encounter the massive and impenetrable resistance of the established circle of Shakespeare academics occupying the respective professorships (303). Accordingly, like-minded Oxfordians are often encouraged to not repeal their claims.²⁸

In this climate, defenders of alternative candidates start to conceive of themselves as a small group fighting against an overly powerful opponent, standing up for the common good – which in this case consists in the truth about the Author and who they see as his respective embodiment. Their aim is to help the Author and his readers to justice because “the readers of those plays would not only want to know of the man who wrote [the plays and poems] but would also want to honour him as the greatest literary genius in history.” (Blumenfeld 1)

It is these asymmetric power relations that contribute to the hardening of the situation. Apart from being a war of beliefs the Shakespeare Authorship Debate also is subject to power relations – superiority and denial of defeat. The group processes and mechanisms accompanying firm belief and feelings of minority blind contributors and turn the debate into a psychologically charged “minefield”

²⁸ For an example see the Preface and Foreword of *Great Oxford* as well as the Conclusion (355). Hunter argues in *Will – Wunsch und Wirklichkeit* that the throng of sceptics is growing each day. “Es wird der Tag kommen, dass orthodoxe Befürworter des traditionellen Barden wie Professor Shapiro gewisse Fragen werden beantworten müssen, ...” (309)

(Schrujjer 125) outside of serious scholarship. The mutual insults that have entered the debate are symptoms of the emotional layers through which evidence and arguments are judged. While Hunter compares himself and his colleagues to Galilei, Scott, for example, compares “Shakespeare-deniers” to “Holocaust-deniers” (McCrea 222).²⁹ This supports Schrujjer’s thesis that the debate is characterized by relational rather than rational conflicts (129). Clearly, professional scholars want to keep out of this. After having spent a few sentences on the Shakespeare Authorship Debate, David Bevington almost disgustedly interrupts himself: “Enough. I am an academic” (12).

So far, aspects distancing scholars from “Shakespeare”-as-himself have been in the focus. Yet, I also demanded with Ioppolo that Shakespeare be seen within the theatrical world he lived in instead of above it (8-9). In the second part of this chapter I want to have a brief look at this world to outline how researchers can actually get closer to “Shakespeare”. Obviously, such an attempt is linked to most recent images of authorship.

4.2 Who Was “Shakespeare”?

“[Shakespeare] was a working man of the theatre and worked as his colleagues and collaborators worked.” (Ioppolo 184) Being a playwright in the early modern world of English theatre meant to be one among many other playwrights. There was a huge demand for new plays to satisfy the regularly returning audiences. The institutionalized theatres had to compete with bear fights and public hangings. The lifespan of a play was short.³⁰ That it was rather the names of theatre companies than the names of “authors” that drew audiences into the playhouses, is demonstrated by the fact that “[r]oughly half of the dramatic texts produced in the last two decades of the 16th century were anonymous” (Brooks 176).

As has been made clear above, it is essential to not just transfer modern ideas of authorship to a different period of time when “authors” were referred to as playwrights – hence the inverted commas. The term playwright thereby gives interesting insights into contemporary images of “authorship”. A *wright* is a maker of some kind. The old English word denotes a craftsman. A cartwright, to choose a random example, is someone who makes – i.e. builds – carts. A playwright correspondingly is someone who makes – i.e. crafts – plays. He uses words and gives them a dramatic form (2). Apparently, the production of plays for a theatre performance as entertainment first and foremost was seen as a technical process. In order to be a playwright one had to be good with one’s hands rather than with one’s head or heart. Clearly, these producers of plays do not appear especially fit for glorification as gods or saints.

²⁹ Steven Greenblatt draws this comparison in a letter to the editor published 4 September 2005 in the *New York Times* (Leahy, 121-122).

³⁰ See, for example: Baker/Hinds (ed). *The Routledge Anthology of Renaissance Drama*, 1-13 and for suggestions of further readings: 14-20.

For Brooks, authorship is only gained by “the translation from stage to page”, by the printing and publishing of written texts (167). The printed text is longer-lasting than the word spoken before an audience. A reader has different expectations towards a text than has a theatre-goer. Given the quantitative and qualitative limitations to book production at the time, printed texts appreciated in value. The shift from “stage to page” brought with it a shift from a quickly-outdated produce for the masses to a work of art not anybody could afford (cf. Finkelstein/McCleery esp. 441-449). The person behind the produce was a craftsman. The person behind the art, however, had some higher qualities – some authorial qualities – even if there was still no clear indication of who wrote what (Brooks 167).

The shift described here has already been mentioned in chapter 2. It is interesting to note that Shakespeare and his colleagues lived at a time when there was first created a market for printed drama (36). Shakespeare’s earliest publications were his poems *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594). Their publication fell right within the years of 1592 to 1594 when all the theatres were closed because of a severe outbreak of bubonic plague. One can conclude that Shakespeare was only secondarily interested in publication and wrote for theatre performance in the first place (cf. Brooks 55-56). *Venus and Adonis* as well as *Lucrece* were never intended for the stage, though. It is rather the publication of some of Shakespeare’s plays in Quarto editions that is noteworthy. The merger of professional theatre and print publication had consequences on the authorial status of the plays. While in the first decades of professional theatre less than 20 percent of published plays gave an “author’s” name on their title pages, there was a sharp increase of author attribution over the next two decades until roughly 60 percent of the plays published were attributed to an “author” – or even several “authors” (Brooks 138-139).

The 1647 Beaumont and Fletcher folio is one of the examples Brooks gathers in his analysis of title pages. It is one of the examples in which one text or one collection of texts is assigned to more than one “author” (140-188; Vickers, 2002, 3-43, esp. 8-18). This is where a problem arises, which is formulated by Brooks as the question: “How can two become one? How can two authors write one text?” (167). Two authors’ names cannot unequivocally be linked to one text. Singular authorship – the idea of the author or its denial – has been the dominant theme in authorship theories. Therefore, it appears not quite so natural to conceive of authorship as collaborative.

The idea of collaborative authorship is further complicated by the entanglement of the concept of the author and the concept of copyright which was already proposed by Foucault. Mark Rose explains that “the author is conceived of as the originator and therefore the owner of a special kind of commodity, the work.” (1) The other way round, “[c]opyright is founded on the concept of the unique individual who creates something original and is entitled to reap a profit from those labours.” (2) In this straightforward relationship it is not easy to define what shared proprietorship means and what consequences it implies. Does each sharer’s own-

ership comprise specific pages, paragraphs or even words? It is from here on that things start to get complicated. Rose declares copyright to be a specifically modern invention dependent on the invention of the printing press and the development of an advanced marketplace society (3). The first copyright statute was introduced to Britain in 1710 – almost 100 years after Shakespeare’s death (4). Before, “the concept of an author owning a work did not quite fit the circumstances of literary production in the traditional patronage system.” (17) This does not mean, however, that playwrights did not have literary interests. Even if they did not own their texts, they did own their manuscripts for which booksellers as well as theatre companies were a market (17-18). Still, different playwrights seemed to have had different images of themselves as playwright or “author”. Rose names Shakespeare and Benjamin Jonson as two examples: Whereas Shakespeare could be characterised as a “reteller of tales” and seemed to conceive of himself as “a modest storyteller”, Jonson actively promoted the publication of his plays and presented himself as the “author” of his 1616 folio *The Workes of Benjamin Jonson* (25-26).

Rose identifies “Shakespeare” as participant in an essentially collaborative process. Seeing in “Shakespeare” “the master poet-dramatist” who would never have anyone “retouch his own creations” (Wilbert 101), more than anything indicates the serious lack of knowledge some scholars have of the world Shakespeare was part of. Rose’s assertion that “[t]he author’s claim [to his manuscript] (...) ceased with the transfer to a bookseller or theatre company” (18) is partly suspended by Grace Ioppolo, though. She makes clear that the transmission of texts “in the age of Shakespeare, Jonson, Middleton and Heywood” was a circular and by no means linear process. Collaboration is identified as the main mechanism in all stages of production (1). This does not only concern the working together of more than one playwright on a single text but also the working together of playwrights with acting companies and brokers (42). As stated above, the demand for new plays was enormous, and it was trial and error that taught playwrights what worked out on the stage and what pleased the audiences (70-74). Ioppolo demonstrates that playwrights accompanied their texts throughout their production on stage maintaining close contact with the actors (41-44, 134-140). Even after the completion of a manuscript did a continuous revising of the texts remain part of a play’s production. The revisions partly were done by the playwright but changes could be introduced by actors, editors or censors as well (121-125). Editors also kept close relations to scribes and other theatre personnel to come by the manuscripts they needed (145-147). Still, concludes Ioppolo, the dominant circulation of plays in Shakespeare’s time was in performance rather than print (184).

Ioppolo, by making use of extant archival evidence such as contracts, theatre records and accounts, receipts etc., offers new insights into the early modern world of English theatre. She follows the transmission of texts from playwright to censor to playhouse to audience finding that the way of transmission was not as clear as it might appear on first glance. “Authors” kept returning to their texts after their composition. Even *circular* – the term she assigns to the process of text transmis-

sion – seems almost too straightforward for this interrelation of the theatrical business (esp. 138). A business world it was, indeed – with all participants in the process thinking of strategies to keep the audiences returning to the respective playhouses. Ioppolo explains that theatre people – including the playwrights – were businessmen not too blue-eyed to not think of marketing strategies that would bind audiences. The production of sequels and circles like, for example, Shakespeare's *Henry* plays holds as an example (73).

Altogether, it seems that it was the theatrical world that connected playwrights with their work while printing rather distanced them from their texts. Highly collaborative as this world was, a collaborative image of authorship is what follows.

Shapiro presents “Shakespeare”-as-collaborator in the last chapter of *Contested Will* where he tries to draw a picture of the man within his world. Shakespeare must be seen as an integral part of his acting company, which he remained with longer than most other playwrights (228-240). “Shakespeare’s” authorship must be understood as collaborative in nature. Most recent, post-revisionist conceptions of authorship emphasise this social embeddedness of authors and their texts.

The method, as for example used by Shapiro, might bring the researcher closer to “Shakespeare”-as-himself than any guesswork concerning bits and pieces taken from his plays and sonnets to construct a relation to his life could. Even if Shapiro had got it all wrong, which Detobel accuses him of, he achieved more through this approach than any of the speculators about “Shakespeare’s” thoughts, feelings and experiences. The problem, however, remains that “Shakespeare”-as-collaborator appears much more unnatural and contrived than “Shakespeare”-as-genius. In Brooks words “Shakespeare” seems to be the

anti-type of collaboration. (...) Translated into nearly one hundred languages and sold in nearly every country on earth, Shakespeare’s plays have come to represent the standard by which ‘great literature’ is measured, and *the name of Shakespeare* has become a synonym for authorship itself (2).³¹ (My own highlighting.)

The name of Shakespeare – is there nothing more than a name in the end?

³¹ As Blumenfeld states, collaboration as the fashion of creation of the plays must be excluded when Marlowe writing from exile is assumed as author of the plays. “And that is why the plays in the First Folio stand out as the miraculous work of an extraordinary genius working alone.”, concludes Blumenfeld (343). Marlovians tend to take the easy way out.

5 Meeting “Shakespeare”-As-Himself

5.1 Who Is “Shakespeare”?

The inherent problem of most Shakespeare biographies and alternative Shakespeare biographies is that they never ask who “Shakespeare” *was*. Unconsciously or not they instead ask who “Shakespeare” *is*. Asking who “Shakespeare” was means to try and trace the social and communicative codes of his time, the perceptions and mentality people shared. Asking who “Shakespeare” was means to see the known facts about him in light of the past. The answer then is that “Shakespeare” was an actor-playwright-businessman of the London theatre around 1600. When he is seen in relation to others of his profession, one can by pointing out similarities and differences draw a picture of the man that actually might be a valuable contribution to understanding how theatres, performances and audiences worked at the time and what part plays held in that context, what meaning they had.

Edmond Malone was the first who in a way tore “Shakespeare” and his plays apart. As was mentioned, “[u]ntil the late eighteenth century, the text selected for editing was the one closest to the editor rather than that closest to the author: the text that had undergone the most rather than the least mediation.” (De Grazia 52) Malone’s obsession with authenticity changed a lot. Authenticity placed the Shakespearian texts in the past (70-71). Ideas of their author, however, moved farther and farther away from contemporary notions of authorship. This is why I propose that most (alternative) Shakespeare biographies ask who “Shakespeare” *is*. In their argumentation they take their own imagination of authorship, their own perspectives and their own worldview as guidelines. The obvious outcome is that “[e]very age creates its own Shakespeare.” (Garber, 2004, 3)

While the temporal distance between the author and his plays is widening, discrepancies between the known facts about Shakespeare and the image of “Shakespeare” are becoming more and more conspicuous. Finally, the critical point is reached when there are others who seem to make by far a better Author. As was demonstrated in chapter 1 by means of Bacon, de Vere and Marlowe the propositions of the alternative candidates were very much children of their time. These candidates replaced Shakespeare of Stratford as god of idolatry and gained their own communities of faith, of followers who believed in them and set out to missionize not recognising how heavily biased their beliefs were.

It seems almost surprised when Rose ascertains “Shakespeare” to have been a participant in a cultural production that was essentially collaborative, but to see him of all people – not Jonson for that matter – installed as the “epitome of original genius”. Because so little is known of him, is Rose’s assumption, “Shakespeare” had to be invented (122). Then, of course, relative to his fellow playwrights it is not so little that is known about Shakespeare. What is known about him simply is not what people are after, what would satisfy their respective image of the Author (Holderness, 2012, 3).

In the last chapter I will try to bring together the abstract notion of “Shakespeare”-as-imagined, as caught between questions of religion and authorship with the actual images of him as they have survived the deconstruction of the Author. Even, or maybe especially, professional Shakespeare scholars cannot avoid the question of who “Shakespeare” was. They must find answers when they are asked who the true author is. Truth is closely connected to a name.

5.2 “What’s in a name?”

Roland Emmerich’s “Anonymous” is the most recent film on “Shakespeare’s” life that reached a mass audience. Many may have watched the film as an Elizabethan thriller. Yet, it develops its influence beyond entertainment in a more subtle way. Clearly, “Anonymous” is fiction and has its justification as entertainment. Emmerich’s doubts concerning “Shakespeare’s” authorship, however, are real and he expresses them in interviews about the film. What consciously or not remains in people’s heads is a question mark. Sometime or other this question mark might turn into the articulation of a question. In the Prologue of *Contested Will* Shapiro describes a situation when a nine-year-old asks him: “My brother told me that Shakespeare really didn’t write *Romeo and Juliet*. Is that true?” (5) It seems to be a simple question that requires a simple answer – yes or no. The nine-year-old looks for confirmation by an expert he trusts has more authority than his brother. Such a question wants a name as an answer. But is it that simple?

Even if scholars agree on a collaborative interpretation of “Shakespeare’s” authorship and even if “Shakespeare’s” glorification happened pretty much independently of the plays and poems, his name is by now irrevocably linked to his texts. In Foucault’s sense, it is the name of “Shakespeare” that denotes a body of works including a number of plays and poems while excluding others. “Shakespeare’s” name holds together this body of works. The plays and poems are referred to as “Shakespeare’s” by scholars who know them as a product of collaboration and even by defenders of alternative candidates who talk about the “Shakespearean texts” or the “plays and poems attributed to Shakespeare”.

What’s in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet.

Romeo and Juliet (II, ii, 1-2)

Maybe there is a lot more in “Shakespeare’s” name. The works and the name seem to be mutually dependent. Today, “Shakespeare” would be nothing without the plays and poems. The plays and poems, however, are only what they are because they are read as the works of the Author, the romantic genius, the god of bardolatry. They will never be de Vere’s plays and poems or that of any other candidate.

John Heminges and Henry Condell put the name of “Shakespeare” before a body of works collected in the First Folio in 1623. Brooks points out that within

the decade the First Folio appeared the habit of attribution had changed so that there was an author attribution of about 70 per cent while company attribution had dropped to roughly 45 per cent. Brooks imagines that Heminges and Condell took their chance and found a new market for their old dramatist (138). Had they not done so, neither the name nor the plays could possibly have developed their power. As it is with “Shakespeare” and his plays and poems, the name and the texts seem to be two parts of one thing. In the end, “Shakespeare” seems to be a name and the rest is imagination. “No biography: that’s ‘Shakespeare’”, states Sean Gaston.

Shakespeare is like God: unparalleled creation, and no biography. Or, perhaps more accurately he is like Jesus Christ, whose scraps and traces of an unprovable and unproved life sustain the belief in a more than human life, in an exception without example (91).

The lack of knowledge about “Shakespeare’s” personal life comprises the possibility for scholars to imagine “Shakespeare”-as-their ideal author. This is why some biographers conceive of him as being “Christ-like” because what “Christ-like” denotes is the consolidation of all the characteristics they consider worthwhile and valuable in one person – or rather the image of one person.

All this, however, only adds up to who “Shakespeare” is – “Shakespeare”-as-a name, “Shakespeare”-as-an image, “Shakespeare”-as-who people want him to be. “[H]e changes so as his texts respond to our questionings.” (Bevington 238) It does not say anything about who “Shakespeare”-as-himself was. Yet, it suffices as a simple answer to a simple question. In the end, it indeed is that simple. The answer to the little boy’s question could be that it *is* “Shakespeare” who wrote *Romeo and Juliet*. Or the answer could be that the extant evidence and the circumstances of life in the theatrical world of early modern England support no conclusion but that it *was* William Shakespeare of Stratford, the actor-playwright-businessman, who wrote *Romeo and Juliet* in a collaborative effort. The answer in both cases is a name and the names in both cases sound alike.

When there is no decisive difference, however, where is the point in going on discussing “Shakespeare’s” authorship, where is the point even in discussing the debate itself?

5.3 In the end there is no end

Defenders of alternative candidates for “Shakespeare” often seem to feel treated condescendingly by professional Shakespeare scholars. For that reason do most contributors to Detobels *Will – Wunsch und Wirklichkeit* mention somewhat appreciatively that an expert in his field like Shapiro at least went so far as to admit to the Shakespeare Authorship Debate before they start hacking away at *Contested*

Will.³² Shapiro deals with the debate by convincingly showing why it does exist by which he simultaneously shows why it should not. From what has been set out in this paper, however, it must be concluded that in the end there indeed is no Shakespeare Authorship Debate. What does exist is a “Shakespeare” War of Beliefs and this in turn is exactly the reason why there will be no end.

On the one hand the lack of knowledge about “Shakespeare’s” personal life is what made possible the apotheosis of “Shakespeare”. Shakespeare is “Shakespeare” because of what is not known about him. On the other hand, the lack of knowledge is what led to the building up of belief. To repeat what was stated in the beginning: belief is not knowledge. Leahy explains that it is belief which determines truth and not the other way round (119). “Belief (...) consists much more in the idea of believing in something because other people do than in any individual adherence to a dogma or truth.” (120) Indeed, it seems as if facts did not play such an important role in the debate – they are interpreted conveniently, misunderstood, ignored or arranged in favour of the one or the other theory. It is the respective narration itself that is of importance.

“[B]elief resides in the telling – citing and reciting – rather than in any original object” (120). Belief means to again and again reiterate what is believed in. The process is decisive, not the actual object of belief. In other words, it is not God who holds together the religious community but the Church as an institution, the organization of religious life through the Holy Script, sermons and rituals. Similarly, it is not the respective candidate who holds together the respective believers. Each of the “Shakespeare” candidates is worshipped as “Shakespeare”-as-god of bardolatry. This worship is founded on firm belief and for to keep this belief alive it must be articulated over and over again. The consequence now is obvious: the Shakespeare Authorship Debate must live or none of the alternative candidates is going to survive. The debate must live on for each of the “Shakespeares” to live – even and especially after the death of the author. For this reason will Shakespeare biographies, alternative Shakespeare biographies and polemics continue to be written, published and criticised. For this reason, there will be no end.

Belief and scholarship that is based on fact, knowledge, and logical interpretation do not seem to go together. It might be argued that if the Shakespeare Authorship Debate cannot be taken seriously, it should not be part of the scholarly discourse. This is the wrong conclusion, though. For one thing, if scholars do not want to exist as a caste all by themselves and above everything else, they must be able to provide answers to questions like that of Shapiro’s nine-year-old and also be prepared to answer to films like “Anonymous” that leave their marks on the people having seen it. For another thing, some scholars have already recognised the value inherent to the Shakespeare Authorship Debate: LaPorte sees it as symptomatic for the shaping of ideas of literature by religious discourses and raves: “Many examples of this exist, but none are more salient than popular debates

³² Compare, for example: Hunter, 302; Whalen, 310.

about the historical identity of Shakespeare that emerged 150 years ago in connection to related doubts about the historical identity of Jesus.” (609) In that respect the debate is “an epiphenomenon, a secondary symptom, a consequence for the extraordinary elevation of the dramatist’s status that occurred in the 18th century.” (Bate 106) and, thus, a rewarding object of authorship studies. It is a cultural phenomenon that carries a Darwinian and a Freudian heritage (Gaston 98). It is here that the scientific nature of academics is itself put in the focus when in the heap of publications there must be made a difference between what is “research” and what is “search” (99). “Research” then also means to reflect on today’s influences on all research conducted.

Holderness thinks along similar lines when he emphasises in “Nine lives” that Shakespeare biographies are revealing more of the biographers than their subject of biography (12). He cites Samuel Schoenbaum: “Trying to work out Shakespeare’s personality is like looking at a very dark glazed picture in the National Portrait Gallery: at first you see nothing, then you begin to recognise features, then you realize that they are your own.” (Schoenbaum ix)

In this sense the Shakespeare Authorship Debate should be taken seriously as an object of study. It is a multi-faceted interrelated complex. There are literary, cultural, religious, psychological, technical and historical aspects to it. Scholars from many different fields have the feeling they had something to add to it. William D. Rubinstein contributes a “Historian’s perspective” seeing himself in a superior position because, for him, the Shakespeare Question is a historical one “to which normal concepts of historical evidence surely apply.” (41)³³ Somewhat more modest Schruijer adds a psychologist’s analysis and so does Sally Hazelton arguing for Edward de Vere.

At the moment, most of these interdisciplinary voices seem to come to nothing. As long as the debate is intruded only to append just another point of view to one theory or other, the value of these new perspectives is very limited. Only on a meta-level can they really contribute to a fuller understanding not only of the debate itself but also of the processes and developments which the Shakespeare Authorship Debate is symptomatic of. The prerequisite for this is a reflected and differentiated agreement of how writing and authorship should be understood. Holderness proposes:

we can think about writing, not via the romantic image of the writer as an isolated individual genius, but rather, in a more modern sense, as a collective cultural activity taking place in the busy professional

³³ In a most recent work from 2012, Rubinstein presents a detailed historical analysis of several „Shakespeare“ candidates. Although he rather made a case against Shakespeare in his contribution to *Shakespeare and His Authors*, he concludes in *Who Wrote Shakespeare’s Plays?* that a relatively strong case for Shakespeare can be made. The historical evidence most prominently suggests Sir Henry Neville-as-“Shakespeare” while it is considered surprisingly weak for de Vere (152).

environment in which a collaborative work like *Sir Thomas More* was messily and roughly concocted (27, highlighting in original).

If anything, this is who “Shakespeare” was.

6 Conclusions

In order to answer the central question of this paper – who was “Shakespeare” – I first summarized the cases for three exemplary Shakespeare candidates in chapter 1. Based on Shapiro’s *Contested Will* my aim was to constitute the respective theories as historically evolved. The analysis of structural and argumentative similarities between the different groups establishes methodological weaknesses most works of defenders of alternative candidates share and also is a first step towards an understanding of the debate as a question of belief rather than knowledge.

That there are still publications in favour of Bacon – like the one by Andrew Peck – although the number of his defenders has been shrinking for about 150 years is indicative of how the objects of belief are kept alive. As long as there are publications, there will be a Shakespeare Authorship Debate and so long doubt and belief will live. All in all, the methods used by defenders of alternative candidates have no reliability and no validity. They are too much creations of their own time.

There are two basic fields from which I looked at the Shakespeare Authorship Debate – one being religion and the other one authorship theories. Both have a major bearing on imaginations and inventions concerning “Shakespeare”. Analogies between bardolatry – the “Shakespeare”-cult – and religion can be found on an external as well as an internal level. On the external layer, I referred to the theological origins of the debate and the structural and literary discourses as suggested, for example, by Shapiro and LaPorte. On the internal layer, I argued that new ways of editing Shakespeare abstracted him from his works. Back in the theatre this abstractness was used to create a god-like image of the author to worship. In the Romantic Age this turned into the veneration of “Shakespeare” – as poetic genius, which is the still dominant image of the Author, especially outside the field of scholarly literary criticism. As the most recent candidate presented in chapter 1 Marlowe is the best example for how Romantic images of authorship prevailed.

Closely related to images of “Shakespeare” are ideas of authorship in a more general sense. I asked why “Shakespeare” – the embodiment of the Author – did not die after the deconstruction of the Shakespeare myth by poststructuralists like Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. With Burke I argued that the idea of no-author feels unnatural because the idea of author already existed. Therefore, it can only be a decision of criticism to read a text with or without the author. My suggestion was that the divide between professional and non-professional Shakespeare scholars becomes most evident here. The reason is that non-professionals rather

ask who “Shakespeare” *is* instead of who he *was*. The image created in this case is very often dominated by Romantic ideals of authorship. Yet, it is in trying to answer the question who “Shakespeare” was that has the potential to take scholars closer to the truth. Even if that means to accept an interpretation of “Shakespeare” opposed to personal imaginations and ideals. A brief outline was then given of what the professional world of the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre was like for Shakespeare-as-one among several playwrights. This served to illustrate today’s approach towards authorship as collaborative and as a culturally embedded process.

The question of who “Shakespeare” was can only be answered by taking the documentary evidence and interpreting it carefully in terms of what is known about the situation of playwrights in the early modern world of English theatre. The way to go is from documentary evidence to “author” instead of the other way round from the ‘as Author identified figure’ to an explanation for the documentary evidence. What the documentary evidence renders in the case of William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon is an actor-playwright-businessman and as such he is approachable. As was stated in the Introduction, the question who “Shakespeare” was does not go without the question of why it does matter. The answer is the inherent consequence of the debate being about faith rather than fact. When belief means to articulate what is believed in, the Shakespeare Authorship Debate is a necessity because it is symptomatic of the efforts to keep the respective objects of belief upright, to keep the different Shakespeare candidates alive. Belief is a self-reinforcing process.

In the end, it must be kept in mind that today’s theories also are creations of their time. Everyone and everything is part of history. Nobody stands above it. With this in mind, however, scholars are given a methodological choice in approaching Shakespeare making him open to interpretation. As soon as this is understood the Shakespeare Authorship Debate may serve as a fascinating object of study for a history of ideas. Outside the professional field of literary criticism, readers can take their liberty to find “Shakespeare”, to quite freely imagine the Author and his text. It might be interesting and revealing to see what is made of him today. Next time maybe – when reading “Shakespeare” – one should just come as oneself.

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