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Authorship and Alteration: Shakespeare on the Exclusion Crisis Stage and Page, 1678-1682

Emma Depledge

Ten radically altered versions of Shakespeare's plays appeared on stage between 1678 and 1682, partly in response to what is known as the Exclusion Crisis. The plays differ from earlier Shakespeare alterations in a number of important ways and mark the most intense period of Shakespeare rewriting since the playwright's death. By separately considering the two media for which the plays were designed, the stage and the page, and by exploring the way Shakespeare as author-source was presented in the paratextual material accompanying the plays onto the stage and the page respectively, this essay suggests that reverence for Shakespeare and claims of textual ownership varied according to medium, thus offering conflicting views of Shakespeare to late seventeenth-century audiences and readers of playbooks. These conflicting views, I contend, are intimately linked to unequal levels of stage and page censorship during, and as a direct result of, the Exclusion Crisis. The essay offers a case for seeing the Exclusion Crisis as one of the most significant points in Shakespeare's authorial afterlife.

Between 1678 and 1682, when King Charles II was at odds with Parliament over the policy to exclude his brother, James, the Duke of York, from the succession, ten radically altered versions of Shakespeare's plays appeared on stage at the two licensed theatres in Restoration London, the Duke's Theatre, Dorset Gardens, and the King's Theatre, the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane (see Table 1).¹ The plays were taken from

¹ I use the label "alterations" throughout in order to reflect contemporary usage. Late seventeenth-century title-pages use "altered" where we would today use "adapted," and as distinct from "revived," which is predominantly used to denote an earlier play which has appeared on stage without the introduction of major changes. The first recorded use

Table 1: Shakespeare Alterations of the Exclusion Crisis, 1678-1682

Playwright Title-Page Attribution	Title	Likely Première	Company
“Made into a / PLAY. / By THO. SHADWELL”	<i>Timon of Athens, or The Man-Hater</i>	1678	Duke’s
“Alter’d from Mr SHAKESPEARS Works, / By Mr. Edw Ravenscroft”	<i>Titus Andronicus, or The Rape of Lavinia</i>	1678	King’s
“Written By JOHN DRYDEN / Servant to his Majesty”	<i>Troilus and Cressida, or Truth Found Too Late</i>	1679	Duke’s
“By Thomas Otway”	<i>The History and Fall of Caius Marius (Romeo and Juliet)</i>	1679	Duke’s
“Written By CROWN”	<i>The Misery of Civil-War (2 & 3 Henry VI)</i>	1680	Duke’s
“By N. TATE”	<i>The History of Richard II / The Sicilian Usurper</i>	1680	King’s
“Reviv’d with Alterations / By N. Tate”	<i>The History of King Lear</i>	1681	Duke’s
“Written By Mr. CROWN.”	<i>Henry the Sixth, the First Part, with the Murder of Humphrey Duke of Glocester (2 Henry VI)</i>	1681	Duke’s
“By N. Tate”	<i>The Ingratitude of a Commonwealth, or the Fall of Caius Martius Coriolanus</i>	1681	King’s
“By Tho. Durfey, Gent.”	<i>The Injured Princess, or the Fatal Wager (Cymbeline)</i>	1682	King’s

of the term “adaptation” to denote “the alteration of a dramatic composition to suit a different audience” dates from 1790 (*OED*), more than a century after the Exclusion Crisis.

1st Printed	Printed by / for	Reference to Shakespeare in Printed Dramatic Paratexts	Reference to Shakespeare in Printed Readerly Paratexts
1678	By J. M. for Henry Herringman	Prologue & Epilogue	Yes
1687	By J. B. for J. Hindmarsh	Surviving section of original prologue (quoted in Langbaine) cites Shakespeare	Yes
1679	For Able Swall and Jacob Tonson	Prologue	Yes
1680	For Tho. Flesher	Prologue	No
1680	For R. Bentley and M. Magnes	Prologue states that “the Divine Shakespar did not lay one stone”	No dedication or address
1681	For Richard Tonson & Jacob Tonson	No	Yes
1681	For T. Flesher to be sold by R. Bentley & M. Magnes	Prologue & Epilogue	Yes
1681	For R. Bentley and M. Magnes	Prologue & Epilogue	Yes
1682	L. M. for Joseph Hindmarsh	Prologue	Yes
1682	For R. Bentley and M. Magnes	No	No dedication or address

Shakespeare's histories and tragedies, with the majority of playwrights seeking to exploit parallels between Shakespeare's plays and the Exclusion Crisis. In his *King Lear*, for instance, Nahum Tate added passages to point to the parallel between the Bastard, as Edmund is called in this version, and the Duke of Monmouth, Charles II's illegitimate son, the Exclusionists' chief candidate for the throne (Maguire 34). Most of the plays selected for alteration depict civil unrest, rebellion, and disobedience, enabling the (predominantly royalist) altering playwrights to demonize the Duke of York's enemies and rival claimants to the throne while offering stark warnings about the consequences of interfering with the legal line of succession.

The Exclusion Crisis takes its name from a bill introduced in Parliament by opponents of James. With Charles II failing to produce any legitimate children, the crown was due to pass to his brother, James. James's opponents sought to bar him from the legal line of succession on the grounds of his conversion to Catholicism in the early 1670s. The first bill was introduced in 1679, but objection to James's claim to the throne had already been mounting for a number of years. The bill was rejected on three occasions, and Charles II prorogued Parliament for the last time in March 1681, completing the remainder of his rule without Parliament. The impact of the Exclusion Crisis was considerable: the late 1670s and early 1680s saw great division in the nation.

The decision to alter Shakespeare's plays in this period was in no way inevitable, and it is important to recognize the material conditions that are likely to have made alteration of an earlier play an appealing option. Playwrights were entitled to the third night's profit, but the run of unsuccessful plays ended before the third night. Prologues and epilogues of the Exclusion Crisis frequently bemoan diminished audience numbers, and some critics even cite the Crisis as a key factor in the financial collapse of the King's Company and the subsequent formation of the United Company in 1682 (Owen 159). Alteration of a pre-existing play may therefore have offered a way of increasing one's theatrical output, an important consideration if "to be assured of eating, a playwright pretty much needed to get a play successfully staged every year" (Hume 501).

Shakespeare alterations of the Exclusion Crisis offer clues about Restoration playgoers' exposure to Shakespeare and provide insights into late seventeenth-century notions of textual property. In considering these altered plays, I wish to concentrate on their theatrical and readerly paratexts: prologues and epilogues on the one hand, and dedications and prefaces on the other. I suggest that a laxity of print censorship coupled with severe theatrical censorship fostered competing views of textual property. The altering playwright's labour is understated in the theatrical

paratexts, where it is typically suggested that Shakespeare has been revived and updated but not significantly rewritten. However, in the readerly paratexts designed for the print market, the altering playwrights go to great lengths to outline the changes they have introduced, and reclaim the plays as their own.

The theatrical paratexts therefore caused audiences to hear radically altered versions of Shakespeare's plays attributed to him, while readers of the same plays found title-pages containing only the altering playwright's name, followed by discussion of the same playwright's labour in altering his Shakespearean source.² Since the title-pages announce the location of the original performance of the alteration as a marketing strategy, the printed plays and their readerly paratexts may be seen to compete with and rewrite a past theatrical event.

The distinct way in which authorship is attributed in the two media of Exclusion Crisis alterations remains largely overlooked in studies of Shakespeare's authorial afterlife. Barbara Murray has observed about Restoration alterations in general that Shakespeare was depicted to playgoers as "an almost mythologized 'wonder'" but as "flawed and unsophisticated" to readers ("Performance" 437), yet the media-dependent claims to textual property found in alterations of 1678-1682 require further study. I believe that the citation of Shakespeare in the theatrical prologues and epilogues has less to do with the "demand for the acknowledgement and justification of sources" (Kewes 64) than with a desire to disguise potentially inflammatory plays as "old honest" (prologue to Tate's *King Lear* 5) and politically innocuous.³ Equally, altering playwrights used prefaces and dedications not so much to make political messages more explicit (Dobson 72-73), nor to "forestall [. . .] imputations of plagiarism" (Kewes 60), as to reclaim texts attributed to Shakespeare on stage.

What follows is a reading of the ways in which Shakespeare's authorship is presented in these texts. The essay first considers the theatrical paratexts in their oral medium, as pleas delivered by actors hoping to secure a play's longevity on stage. It stresses the significant impact that frequent, oral references to Shakespeare are likely to have had on his authorial afterlife. This is followed by a discussion of the strategies a number of playwrights adopted in order to assert their own claims of

² Play performances are changeable and theatrical paratexts could be modified for subsequent performance, but the intense theatrical censorship to which the Exclusion Crisis stage was subject increases the likelihood that they would have been used for at least the first three productions of a given play.

³ As Michael Dobson states, these theatrical paratexts "deploy canonization – the promotion of Shakespeare as an author supposedly above and beyond contemporary politics – as a way of creating a space of sanctuary" around their plays (73).

textual ownership in the printed versions of plays. My discussion corroborates the view that “the concept of the author as ‘owner’ of his or her text” did not emerge in the eighteenth century, as is sometimes suggested, but was clearly present “in the critical literature and in the commercial practice of the half-century between the Restoration [. . .] and the Copyright Statute of 1710” (Kewes 2).

When the first Shakespeare alteration of the Exclusion Crisis, Thomas Shadwell’s *The History of Timon of Athens*, appeared on stage in 1678, it featured an epilogue informing the audience that it had been “grafted upon Shakespears Stock” (87). The audience attending the next altered play, Edward Ravenscroft’s *Titus Andronicus or, The Rape of Lavina* (1678), was told in the prologue that “Shakespeare by him reviv’d now treads the stage” (Langbaine 456). In 1679 the prologue to John Dryden’s *Troilus and Cressida, or Truth Found too Late* not only made reference to Shakespeare but was delivered by an actor in the guise of Shakespeare’s ghost. It must have appeared as if Shakespeare “reviv’d” really did tread the stage when Thomas Betterton, “Representing the Ghost of Shakespeare,” introduced Dryden’s radically altered *Troilus and Cressida* as his own (i.e. Shakespeare’s) “rough-drawn Play” (sig. b4^r). It is hard to overstate the significance of these oral references to Shakespeare: they made the audience “explicitly aware for what was probably the first time in the late seventeenth century that a play it was about to see had been written by a man named Shakespeare” (Dugas 47).

The on-stage citation of Shakespeare as author-source can be seen as one of the key ways in which alterations of the Exclusion Crisis depart from those produced before 1678. With the exception of Dryden’s prologue to *The Tempest; or The Enchanted Island*, produced in collaboration with William Davenant in 1667, pre-1678 alterations of Shakespeare’s plays did not make reference to Shakespeare as author-source in their theatrical paratexts. Even a knowledgeable theatregoer like Samuel Pepys, who attended almost fifty performances of Shakespeare’s plays, only once mentions Shakespeare’s name in reference to a play.

The one play Pepys associates with Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, offers a powerful indication of the impact theatrical paratexts of 1678-1682 are likely to have had on an audience’s awareness of Shakespeare as author of his texts. Pepys refers to *The Tempest* in 1667, following his attendance at the Dryden and Davenant alteration. The link between Pepys’s reference in 1667 to the play he saw as “an old play of Shakespeare’s” (8.521) and the prologue’s declaration that the play “Springs up” from “old Shakespeare’s honour’d dust” (Clark 87) is apparent. Pepys shows no sign of recognizing the play as an alteration, despite the extensive changes introduced by Dryden and Davenant. Pepys’s failure to mention Shakespeare’s name in conjunction with any of his other plays at an

earlier date is thus most likely due to a lack of knowledge. Post-1678 theatregoers would not have shared such ignorance, since at least eight out of ten alterations produced during the Exclusion Crisis referred to Shakespeare in their theatrical paratexts. The example of Pepys thus suggests that prologues and epilogues had a decisive impact on what theatregoers considered or did not consider as Shakespeare before and during the Exclusion Crisis.

References to Shakespeare in prologues and epilogues are usually designed to present the play as written before the events of recent history, and therefore void of any contentious political commentary. Like Hamlet, they insist that there is “no offense i’th world” (3.2.228-29), despite offering “aggressively topical and consciously emblematic readings of Shakespeare” (Wikander 342). The prologue to Ravenscroft’s *Titus Andronicus* assured audiences that “the Poet does not fear [their] Rage” because “Shakespeare by him reviv’d now treads the stage” (Langbaine 465). The playwright is said to sit down “Under [Shakespeare’s] sacred Lawrels” and, as a result, he and the play ought to be “Safe, from the blast of any Critics frown” (465). This is continued with an expression of apparent modesty: the playwright will not “proudly scorn / To own, that he but winnow’d Shakespeare’s Corn” (465). Ravenscroft has simply refined and separated; this is not a new play.

Similarly, audiences attending a performance of Tate’s *The History of King Lear* were told that they were watching an “old honest play,” Shakespearean “flowers” which Tate had merely strung into a “garland” (5). The modest tone resurfaces when we are told that Tate “Bluntly resolved beforehand to declare” that the audience’s “entertainment should be most old fare” (5). In keeping with the modesty topos, the audience is told that even if “this heap of flowers shall chance to wear / Fresh beauty in the order they now bear,” this too is “Shakespeare’s praise” (5). As in the prologue to Ravenscroft’s *Titus Andronicus*, it is implied that the play ought to be safe because it grew in “rich Shakespeare’s soil” (5). Tate’s alteration of *Coriolanus* features a similar prologue, “written by Sir George Raynsford,” according to which the play “may be safe to Day, / since Shakespeare gave foundation to the play” (6). After all, the playwright “only ventures to make gold from oar, / And turn to Money what lay dead before” (6), so the audience need not suspect a political agenda.

The prologue to John Crowne’s *Henry the Sixth, the First Part* announces that the play the audience is about to see consists of “old gather’d Herbs” which “in sweet Shakespears Garden grew” (Murray, *Shakespeare Adaptations* 272). The epilogue even implies a direct relation between the play’s Shakespearean origin and the possibility that it will make it to a third night: the play may be thought by some to “want

Breath to run a Three-days Course,” but “a Barb that’s come of Shakespears breed” contains the kind of “Poetry [that] long rides Post”. It suggests that the playwright has merely added superficial “trappings” to a well-bred Arabian horse (“barb”) of Shakespeare’s “breed” (Murray, *Shakespeare Adaptations* 372).

The theatrical paratexts promote Shakespeare by suggesting that, if an audience fails to appreciate the Shakespearean material they are watching, then the fault lies with them, not the play. To quote the prologue to Tate’s *King Lear*, “since in rich Shakespear’s soil it grew, / ’Twill relish yet with those whose tastes are true” (5). The prologue to Crowne’s *Henry the Sixth* similarly tells the audience that their “Mouthes are never out of taste” with Shakespeare (Murray, *Shakespeare Adaptations* 272). Perhaps the most spectacular example of this strategy is in Dryden’s prologue to his version of *Troilus and Cressida*, spoken by Shakespeare’s ghost. The ghost’s jingoistic speech addresses audiences as his “love’d Britons,” urges them to “see [their] Shakespeare Rise,” and depicts himself (i.e. Shakespeare) as “Like fruitfull Britain, rich without supply” (sig. b4^r), thus establishing a link between national pride and appreciation of Shakespeare.⁴

By having Shakespeare address the audience, the prologue distances the altering playwright from the play that is being performed. The Shakespeare character announces that the audience “shall behold / Some Master-Strokes, so manly and so bold / That he, who meant to alter found ’em such / He shook; and thought it sacrilege to touch” (sig. b4^r). Dryden, the audience is to believe, did not dare to alter Shakespeare’s “Master-Strokes” (sig. b4^r). The prologue’s aim to foreground Shakespeare at the expense of Dryden is made clear when it asks the audience to “Sit silent then, that my pleas’d soul may see / A judging audience once, and worthy me” (sig. b4^r).

With ten alterations staged between 1678 and 1682, theatregoers had unprecedented access to plays based on Shakespeare. Shakespeare’s name, the prologues and epilogues suggest, echoed through the theatres on a regular basis. The number of theatre productions was almost matched by that of print editions: while pre-1678 alterations were not usually printed until at least a few years after their première, nine Exclusion Crisis alterations of Shakespeare were published within a year of their first performance.

The swift printing of Exclusion Crisis alterations of Shakespeare suggests that many of the playwrights turned to the print market as an addi-

⁴ My interest here is in the strategies used in these paratexts rather than in the overall impression one gains of Shakespeare as a writer. For more on Shakespeare and canonization, see Dobson.

tional source of income, arguably in response to the impact the Crisis had on dramatic censorship.⁵ Only around eighteen plays were banned from the stage between 1660 and 1710 (Kinservik 38), but at least eight of these were suppressed between 1678 and 1682, including two Shakespeare alterations: Tate's *Richard II* and Crowne's *Henry the Sixth*. The punishment meted out to the King's Company for performing Tate's banned play was one of the most severe interventions in theatre history, with the theatre being ordered to close for ten days.⁶ As Susan Owen has noted, some of the suppressed plays were originally granted a license for performance only to have it revoked, and it is hard to generalize about theatrical censorship during the Exclusion Crisis as it existed in many different forms (159). A number of agents sought to control the theatrical output, and the punitive measures ranged from the Lord Chamberlain's emendation of lines to outright bans, imprisonments, and violent attacks on actors and playwrights (Kinservik 36). This climate of intense theatrical censorship accounts for the way a number of playwrights chose to stress their debt to Shakespeare, despite having radically altered their source texts. It also provides a stark contrast with the regulation of printed materials, as print censorship was far more lax than theatre censorship during the Exclusion Crisis (Owen 159-60).

The Licensing Act regulating printed material lapsed in June 1679 as a direct result of the Exclusion Crisis. Charles II had dissolved Parliament over the succession dispute, thereby preventing new legislation, such as the Act's renewal, from being passed. I do not wish to suggest that print censorship vanished altogether after the Act's lapse in 1679, but it does seem to have made the task of controlling the press a great deal more difficult. Each of the plays banned from the stage between 1678 and 1682 found their way into print, and Thomas Shadwell's *The Lancashire Witches* even has italic type to emphasize censored lines (Owen 159-60).

A survey of paratextual references to Shakespeare (see Table 1 above) suggests a correlation between the citation of Shakespeare as author-source in theatrical paratexts and the addition of readerly paratexts in which playwrights provide further commentary on Shakespeare's role as author-source. This supports the view that readerly paratexts functioned as a means of re-writing the earlier theatrical event. One may also identify a relationship between the absence of theatrical paratexts citing Shakespeare and a complete lack of readerly paratexts.

⁵ For more on earning a living from the theatre and as an author of books in the period 1660-1740, see Hume.

⁶ For a more detailed discussion of Tate's play and Exclusion Crisis censorship, see Johnson.

For example, Crowne's *Misery of Civil War*, which negates Shakespeare's claim to the text in its prologue, and Thomas Durfey's *The Injured Princess* (*Cymbeline*), which makes no reference to Shakespeare in its theatrical paratexts, are printed without any dedication or preface, let alone ones which challenge Shakespeare's claim to the text. It may therefore be posited that the prime function of readerly paratexts was to assert the altering playwright's labour in plays attributed to Shakespeare on stage.

We usually have no access to prologues and epilogues unless they were printed in playbooks. As Tiffany Stern has shown, theatrical paratexts were not always attached to the play-texts in manuscript; instead, "prologues and epilogues were frequently drawn up first on separate pieces of paper from the plays they flanked" (2). The disjointed nature of theatrical paratext is exemplified by Ravenscroft's *Titus Andronicus*, which omitted the original prologue and epilogue. In the address "To the Reader," Ravenscroft claims that they were lost and states that "to let the buyer have his penny-worths, [he furnishes them] with others which were written by [him] to other persons labours" so that "the purchaser may not repine at the author or bookseller for a hard bargain" (Murray, *Shakespeare Adaptations* 5). The concern that potential customers might complain if playbooks did not contain the original theatrical paratexts may well have been particularly great at a time when plays appeared in print so soon after their first performance.

Gerard Langbaine went on to print part of what he claimed was the original prologue to Ravenscroft's *Titus Andronicus*, and did so as the conclusion to an attack on what he saw as Ravenscroft's dishonest "boasts" that the play is a result of his "own pains." No copies of Ravenscroft's complete prologue have been found, but Langbaine clearly possessed one. He offers to "send [Ravenscroft] the whole" of the prologue, "if he desire it," (465) with the tongue-in-cheek tone implying that Langbaine, like me, believes that Ravenscroft had not lost his own copy but chose to omit it from the printed version. Kewes suspects that Durfey may also have deliberately omitted theatrical paratexts from the printed version of his version of *Cymbeline* (71), and I believe that the theatrical paratexts used to introduce Tate's *Richard II* were likely replaced at some point between the play's suppression, its reappearance as *The Tyrant of Sicily* (see Johnson), and its arrival in print. Either way, these printed play-texts work to negate, or even erase, Shakespeare's claim to textual ownership, in diametrical opposition to the prologues and epilogues of several contemporary Shakespeare alterations, which affirm it. Strikingly, the title-pages do the same: of the ten Shakespeare alterations produced from 1678 to 1682, only one mentions Shakespeare on the title-page, offering a stark contrast to the frequent repetition of his name on stage.

As mentioned above, the original theatrical paratexts were often printed with the playbooks, but were frequently prefaced by readerly paratexts which conditioned the reception of the playbook. Theatrical paratexts did not necessarily undermine claims made in readerly paratexts, not least because they were understood as “in a sense anti-author.” As Stern argues, they were “spoken not just by utilized characters but by utilized and phoney versions of ‘the playwright’” (112). Prologues and epilogues speak of the playwright, for the playwright, but they are not spoken by the playwright. They should therefore not be seen as problematizing a playwright’s later, printed claim to textual possession.

There are two ways in which playwrights attempted to reclaim textual possession by means of readerly paratexts. First, they deny Shakespeare’s claim to the altered play. Ravenscroft, for example, claims to have “been told by some anciently conversant with the Stage, that it was not Originally [Shakespeare’s], but brought by a private Author to be Acted.” He then goes on to label his source-play “a heap of Rubbish” before pointing to his own labour. He claims to have found “many Large and Square Stones both usefull and Ornamental to the Fabrick, as New Modell’d” (Murray, *Shakespeare Adaptations* 5). Shakespeare’s *Titus* contained the stones, but Ravenscroft added his labour in order to “model” or build his own play.

Similarly, Tate claims that Shakespeare “painted” his Richard in “the worst colours of history” and suggests that “the Richard of Shakespear and History” was the same, implying that Shakespeare “copied” the history and did not add his own labour to his sources. Tate, by contrast, “discover’d” “Beauties” in Shakespeare and, in a similar vein to Ravenscroft, “new-modell[ed]” them (Murray, *Shakespeare Adaptations* 196, 198).

Following a different line, Crowne negates his earlier claim in the theatrical paratext according to which the play “in sweet Shakespears Garden grew” (Murray, *Shakespeare Adaptations* 272). He concedes that he “called it in the Prologue Shakespeare’s Play,” but adds that Shakespeare “has no Title to the 40th part of it” and that he uses his patron’s “Name to guide [his] Play through the Press, as [he] did Shakespeare’s to support it on the Stage.” He points to Shakespeare’s “Second Part of Henry the Sixth” as source, but adds that he “left it as soon as [he] could,” for Shakespeare’s “Volumn is all up-hill and down,” and he has “undertaken to cultivate one of the most barren places in it” (Murray, *Shakespeare Adaptations* 275). Shakespeare is thus troped as “barren” land, and the adapter-playwright as its cultivator.

The second way in which playwrights reclaimed textual possession is by asking readers to conduct comparative readings between the plays

and the Shakespeare source in order to stress the changes the playwrights have introduced. Ravenscroft states that “the reader [. . .] will find that none in all that Authors works ever received greater alterations, or Additions,” adding that “many scenes [are] entirely new” and that the language has been “refined, [. . .] the principal characters heightened” and “the plot much encrased” (Murray, *Shakespeare Adaptations* 5). Likewise, Tate offers quotations from Shakespeare’s *Richard II* which he explicitly compares with his own version (Murray, *Shakespeare Adaptations* 197-98), and Shadwell boasts that he “can truly say” that he has “made [*Timon of Athens*] into a Play” (sig. a3^r).

Whereas the theatrical paratexts diminish the altering playwrights’ involvement in the creation of the play, readerly paratexts render their labour explicit. In doing so, they may be seen to articulate the “rhetoric of authorship” which developed at the end of the seventeenth century (Kewes 75). Playwrights appear to make the same point in readerly paratexts as Dryden does in his preface to *Don Sebastian* (1690): “’Tis the contrivance, the new turn, and new characters, which alter the property and make it [theirs]” (sig. a4^v). With their emphasis on utilizing stones to rebuild or remodel, and on the cultivation of “barren” land, these playwrights might also be seen as early advocates of the property definition most famously associated with John Locke:

the Labour of [man’s] Body, and the Work of his Hands [. . .] are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his Labour with, and joyned to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his Property. (305-06)

As Kewes has demonstrated, the troping of a source-author “as ‘nature’ to be taken possession of,” added to, “and improved upon” (126) was not exclusively associated with Shakespeare, as Dobson (31-32) seems to imply, but representative of the way contemporary “appropriators” and “commentators” considered “all prior texts” (126). Dryden and Locke’s articulation of property rights therefore offers a context in which the altering playwright’s reclamation of the plays may be better understood.

In *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation*, Margaret Jane Kidnie has recently argued that the borderline between work and adaptation, between “Shakespeare” and “Shakespeare adaptation,” is constantly negotiated, and that the criteria by which “texts and performances are recognized – or not – as instances of a certain work” (10) are always subject to change and dependent on the context of reception. Shakespeare alterations of the Exclusion Crisis provide a powerful illustration of this mechanism. One set of paratexts, the prologues and epilogues spoken in

the theatre, suggest that Shakespeare “survives” (Kidnie 1) in these plays, whereas another set of paratexts, the prefaces and dedications written for the print publication, suggest that he does not, or at least not to the same extent. As a result of the unique constellation during the Exclusion Crisis, with its massed production of Shakespeare alterations on stage and page in very different censorship contexts for the two media, the paratexts to these plays demonstrate with exceptional clarity the contingency of authorship at a specific moment in history. Is Shakespeare the author of these plays? He is or he is not, depending on how various commercial, political, and cultural pressures impinge on the question. It is this very ambivalence which makes of the engagement with Shakespeare during the Exclusion Crisis a crucial moment in his authorial afterlife.

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