

Shakespeare and the Idea of Apocrypha: Negotiating the Boundaries of the Dramatic Canon. Peter Kirwan.

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The term *apocrypha*, applied to books banished from the Jewish and Protestant Christian canons of holy scripture, was naturally carried over to cover works dubiously ascribed to Shakespeare. C. F. Tucker Brooke's Oxford edition of *The Shakespeare Apocrypha* (1908) offered a core of fourteen plays that, he judged, could "without entire absurdity" be included in the "doubtfully Shakespearian" class. They were a motley bunch. *Edward III*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and *Sir Thomas More* have since been admitted to collections and series as partly by Shakespeare, and recent claims have been made for allowing *Arden of Faversham* to join them. *A Yorkshire Tragedy* and *The Puritan* are both wholly by Thomas Middleton. Currently there is little inclination to believe that Shakespeare contributed any lines of dialogue to Brooke's other eight.

Peter Kirwan is not primarily concerned with problems of attribution, though in an appendix he records modern orthodox opinion about the provenance of eighty plays that are absent from the First Folio of 1623 but have at some time been assigned to Shakespeare. Rather, he discusses the commercial, sociological, and intellectual processes that have created changing conceptions of authentic and inauthentic Shakespeare, and explores, in illuminating ways, the synergies between certain apocryphal plays and plays of the Shakespeare canon. The associations in these cases are through King's Men ownership, intercompany rivalries, chronological proximity, and so on, rather than authorship.

The Third Folio of 1664 added seven plays to the First Folio's thirty-six — *Pericles*, *The London Prodigal*, *Thomas Lord Cromwell*, *Sir John Oldcastle*, *The Puritan*, *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, and *Lochrine* — and, as Kirwan points out, for sixty years this forty-three-play canon molded the image of Shakespeare as playwright. Alexander Pope's edition of 1723–25 removed the 1664 additions, as did Lewis Theobald's edition of 1733, even though Theobald claimed that he could prove that every one of them contained “some touches” from Shakespeare's pen. By 1765 Samuel Johnson was content to ignore them. In 1790 Edmond Malone restored *Pericles*, while rejecting the First Folio's *Titus Andronicus*. But German scholars such as Ludwig Tieck (1773–1853) were much more accommodating to the *dubitanda*. Kirwan traces the fortunes of these fringe plays, the gradual consolidation of an orthodox canon and consequent devaluation of its rejects, and the recent advances in attribution studies that present us with a Shakespeare who was often a coauthor.

“Five of Brooke's apocryphal plays were part of the Chamberlain's–King's Men's repertory during Shakespeare's lifetime,” as Kirwan notes (74). They are *Mucedorus*, *Thomas Lord Cromwell*, *The London Prodigal*, *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, and *The Merry Devil of Edmonton*, and the heart of Kirwan's book is the chapter entitled “The Apocrypha in Rep,” exploring ways in which they “interact with the concerns and themes” of contemporaneous Shakespeare First Folio plays (75). A section on “Prodigal Husbands and Patient Wives,” for example, shows that features connecting *The London Prodigal* and *A Yorkshire Tragedy* to the canonical *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well That Ends Well* are “more than superficial” (78). *Cromwell*, like *Sir Thomas More*, exhibits a sympathy for “the viewpoint of the common man” that links it to the work of “the company's resident writer” (98). The famous Q3 (1610) additions to *Mucedorus* are instructively discussed in terms of their bearing on audience reception of “the social aspects of the play” (101). *Merry Devil* and *Oldcastle* are linked to Shakespeare's Falstaff plays under the subheading “Ensemble Comedy.” For Kirwan, Shakespeare is “both individual and plural, a human author and a shorthand for the company's output” (114). His “formative *authoring* role” in disputed plays need not “dissolve a sense of Shakespeare's *writing*” (111). Kirwan goes on to critique attribution studies and to consider what might be involved in claiming “physical traces of Shakespeare” (119) in the additions to *Sir Thomas More*, *Lochrine*, *Edward III*, and *Arden of Faversham*.

Kirwan is keener than I am to invoke indeterminacy, instability, blurred boundaries, indistinctions, and the like, and more wary of value judgements. To me Shakespeare the writer remains far more significant than his amorphous “authoring role.” But plays such as *The London Prodigal* and *The Merry Devil* have theatrical vitality, and Kirwan’s book makes a stimulating contribution to the study of early modern English drama.

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