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The Certainty of Uncertain Knowledge: The Collaborative Authorship of *The Changling*

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'Sharing' *The Changeling* by Playwrights and Professors: The Certainty of Uncertain Knowledge about Collaborations

My purpose in this essay is to argue against the passive acceptance of received wisdom about collaborative authorship of plays in early modern England. I hope to demonstrate that carelessness in the application of attribution methodologies has led scholars astray in their consideration of various issues relating to multiple authorship. I focus on *The Changeling* because of the persistence with which students of that play have disregarded the implications of various thoughtful discussions of attribution methodologies and of dramatic collaboration for their practice of 'sharing' *The Changeling* between two playwrights. It is my basic contention that students of *The Changeling* are operating in an evidentiary vacuum. As I shall try to explain in the pages that follow, the evidence simply does not exist that would enable us to determine how much and which parts of *The Changeling* were 'written' (I will discuss that problematic word) by Thomas Middleton or by William Rowley.

The unusual degree to which scholars have agreed about details of the authorship of *The Changeling* did cause me to hesitate in forming my own skeptical conclusions. I was faced with a preponderance of critical opinion that Rowley wrote the beginning and the ending of the play, and the comic scenes throughout. This view was established by Fleay and Wiggin more than a century ago, and it has persisted up through the most recent edition of the play, Bawcutt's 1998 edition.[1] However, both the awkwardness and the neatness of the arrangement worried me. Would a playwright (Middleton, we are told) who had the role of creating the main plot of the play really be comfortable not having any role in the creation of the first and last acts? Does it make sense that each of two playwrights imaginatively immersed in the chaotic world described in Jacobean drama would abide by a neat, clearly arbitrary, obviously unnecessary arrangment to keep hands off the distinct portions of the play assigned to his collaborator? I was uncomfortable with the picture of the conditions of playwrighting that I was being asked to accept both as a fact for this play and as typical for collaborative playwrighting of the time.

My skeptical attitude (about the broader questions involved, although not about *The Changeling*) does have various kinds of honorable support. Although as far as I know Schoenbaum never questioned the received opinion about this particular play, some of his general warnings demand quotation here:[2]

> Many popular assumptions and facile generalizations about the nature of Elizabethan dramatic collaboration have no secure foundation in external fact, but rest instead on undemonstrated theories or on internal evidence garnered in cheerful violation of the elementary methods I have outlined. (230)

> External evidence cannot be ignored, no matter how inconvenient such evidence may be for the theories of the investigator. (163)

> [The use of internal evidence is problematic because] an author's individuality never exists as pure essence .... All plays, furthermore, are in a sense collaborations, shaped from conception to performance by the author's awareness of the resources of actors and theater, the wishes of impresario or shareholders, and the tastes and capacities of the audience. (149–50)

> It is risky to attempt the allocation of scenes in collaborations, even when all the partners are known ... ; riskier still when not all the collaborators are specified. (162)

External evidence about the authorship of *The Changeling* is extremely limited. The title page of the first edition attributes the work to 'Thomas Midleton, and William Rowley'. That edition, however, was not published until 1653. (Rowley died in 1626, Middleton in 1627.) The pertinent entry in the *Stationer's Register* is dated 19 October 1652; it refers to *The Changeling* as 'written by Rowley'. Clearly, one of these pieces of evidence is less than accurate. And the very fact of the discrepancy should call attention to the essential unreliability of both pieces of external evidence. In fact, as is well known, neither the *Stationer's Register* nor Renaissance title pages can be relied upon to be accurate. Bentley gives several examples of title pages that identify one author despite other evidence of collaborative authorship; he believes that 'the information on single author title pages is often incomplete'.[3] So, while the external evidence cannot be ignored, its very unreliability makes reliance upon internal evidence equally problematic. That is, if Middleton's name as an author of *The Changeling* could be omitted in the *Stationer's Register*, it is equally possible that the name of a third collaborator could have been omitted

from both sources; and (as Schoenbaum has indicated) it is extremely risky to allocate parts in a case where not all the collaborators are known.

Also, as almost everyone notes – without accepting the consequences for study of the authorship of a particular play like *The Changeling* – attributing portions of a play to a particular playwright on the basis of internal evidence assumes that the text whose internal nature we are studying represents the actual intentions of the presumed playwright(s). In other words, we must be wary of textual interference by scribes, prompters, compositors, re-writers, or editors. In the case of a play first printed long after the deaths of its presumed authors, the assumption of a lack of editorial interference is extremely problematic. One twentieth-century editor of *The Changeling* says, 'one may hazard the guess that the copy [of the 1653 quarto] was a fair scribal transcript ... of the authors' foul papers, from which the promptbook would have been prepared'.[4] Bawcutt judges that the printed text was probably based on 'a transcript from theatrical prompt-copy'; he thinks that probably the transcript was made shortly before the actual printing – that is, in 1653, more than 25 years after the deaths of the presumed authors.[5]

Furthermore, distinguishing between the work of Middleton and the work of Rowley necessarily depends on our having knowledge of what their work was like when they worked alone. But do we really know what their unaided work was like? We have a better chance at such knowledge with Middleton. Despite the number of his collaborations with various collaborators, tradition assigns to Middleton approximately thirteen unaided plays. There are some reasons for caution about that figure. First, as already noted, title pages and other official records sometimes, at least, and possibly very often omitted collaborators' names. Moreover, for a majority of the thirteen presumably Middleton-only plays, what Lake calls the 'date of surname attribution' is years after (in two instances as many as 34 years) Middleton's death.[6]

With Middleton, however, I am willing to hold my skepticism at least to some degree in check; even if he had some or much help with many of those thirteen plays, a reasonable person could suppose that careful study of all the plays where there is no reference to a collaborator will give us at least some degree of legitimate information about Middleton's style.

About knowledge of Rowley's style, however, I do not believe we can be nearly so sanguine. Plays created by Rowley alone are usually identified as the following four: *A Shoemaker A Gentleman*; *A New Wonder, A Woman Never Vext*; *All's Lost by Lust*; *A Match at Midnight*. But the evidence for Rowley's singular authorship is merely the absence of any other name in the unreliable

Stationer's Register or on the unreliable title pages. Such evidence, if we did not know (or think we know) better, could lead us to believe that *The Birth of Merlin* and *The Changeling* were written by Rowley alone.[7] It is noteworthy that we have no *Stationer's Register* reference to Rowley as sole author and no title page listing only Rowley as author until at least five years after his death. Moreover, the printed texts that we have of the four 'Rowley plays' are generally regarded as unreliable. The assumption that we know even one play that represents the unaided work of Rowley is an assumption that I am not prepared to make. As Schoenbaum points out with characteristic understatement: 'For any author proposed, a reasonable amount of unchallenged dramatic writing, apart from collaborations, must be extant. The more plays the better' (176). With Rowley, at most we have four unaided plays.

And even that number has been questioned. On the basis of stylistic discrepancies, Hoy doubts that *A Match at Midnight* was written by Rowley alone and also offers tentative support for the suggestion by Fleay that acts 4 and 5 of *A Woman Never Vext* were borrowed from an earlier play.[8] It is altogether possible that we do not have the text of even a single play by Rowley alone.

It is also important to note how the process of studying stylistic patterns and discrepancies seems to lead even very astute scholars astray. Jackson, careful in most respects, overlooks discrepancies when they are inconvenient for his conclusions. For instance, in studying what he regards as 'Middleton contractions', he argues that Rowley uses these contractions 'less frequently' than Middleton – without commenting on why *I'd* (to take just one example) appears only two times in *All's Lost* but as many as fifteen times in *A Woman Never Vext*. Similarly, he makes much of Rowley's greater use of *ye* compared with Middleton – but without commenting on the difference between the 34 instances in *A Shoemaker* and the four instances in *All's Lost*.[9]

Also, when Jackson does note a discrepancy, he tends to dismiss its significance. So, in analyzing the parts of *A Fair Quarrel* to be attributed to Middleton and Rowley, he says that 'The only real anomaly is that *on't* [one of those Middleton contractions] is more frequent in Rowley's share (17 instances) than in Middleton's (5 instances)' (123–4). Earlier, Jackson was pleased to find no instances of *on't* in Rowley's *All's Lost*. Rather than question his overall theory, Jackson is forced to conclude that 'Robb may be right in thinking that Middleton had a hand in the closing pages of *A Fair Quarrel*' (124). One more example of Jackson's tendency to occasionally disregard the inconvenient will suffice. He notes that Rowley was a greater parenthesizer than Middleton;

parentheses appear 12 times in Rowley's approximately 1200 lines of *The Changeling*, only 2 times in Middleton's approximately 1000 lines of that play. And this pattern occurs in all their collaborations – except *A Fair Quarrel* (124). Of the significance of the exception, Jackson has nothing to say.

Like Jackson, Hoy is an ordinarily careful scholar who does not always take into account the possible implications of certain anomalies. For instance, he notes (79) the variation in the Middleton canon of the appearance of contractions with *y'* (such as *y'are*) from 51 instances in *Women Beware Women* to only one instance in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*; but he does not notice how such a variation in one aspect of style could cast any doubt on the conclusions that he draws from other pieces of stylistic evidence, where consistency within an author's work is assumed to be the norm. In his discussion of Rowley's use of the contraction *'em* (for *them*), he notes (without noting any possibility of a larger significance) a difference in the use of *'em* between *A Shoemaker* and Rowley's other unaided plays (83). But Hoy's real interest in this section of his work is in Rowley's use of the alternative contraction *'um* – because that form occurs less frequently in plays of the period and therefore may be more suggestive of Rowley's own hand, his own preference, his own distinct linguistic practice. He focuses on the Middleton-Rowley masque, *The World Tost at Tennis* (85–7), where he finds instances of *'um* to correspond to portions of the masque that are assigned to Rowley and instances of *'em* to correspond to portions assigned to Middleton.

By the time Hoy arrives at his discussion of *The Changeling*, Hoy's theory has become, for him, fact: *'um* demonstrates authorship by Rowley; *'em* demonstrates authorship by Middleton. He proceeds to find confirmation of his theory in the usual assignment of portions of the play. And where he comes upon discrepancies, he either dismisses them or changes the attribution of a portion of a scene:

> Here, as elsewhere, Rowley's *'um* first appears as *'em* (sig. B1^{v}). [As I judge from an earlier part of his discussion, Hoy is postulating a printer's error.] *'Em* and *'um* appear together on sig. C3. [Apparently another printer's error.] But thereafter throughout act 1, which all students of the play agree is Rowley's, the pronominal form is *'um*. *'Em*, on the other hand, is the form that prevails throughout act 2, and this, by general scholarly assent, is Middleton's .... Middleton's 3.4 displays a single occurrence of *'em*; his 4.1, two occurrences of the form. The extent to which this particular piece of linguistic evidence can point to two distinct authorial practices when it has been faithfully preserved in the printed text [why here does Hoy assume compositorial accuracy?] is shown

> in 4.2. Miss Wiggin, Robb, and Stork concur in giving the entire scene to Middleton, but the linguistic evidence displayed here makes possible a more precise attribution. Rowley opens the scene with the first five speeches that comprise the exchange between Vermandero and the servant; and *'um* occurs twice in Vermandero's speech beginning 'The time accuses *'um* (sig. F4). But immediately thereafter, with the entrance of Tomazo, Middleton's hand appears, and the Vermandero who has said *'um* a few lines earlier now says *'em* on the same quarto signature. (87–8)

We may notice that Hoy assumes compositorial accuracy or inaccuracy according to his convenience, that he uses the attributions of earlier scholars when they support his theories and 'corrects' those earlier attributions when he comes upon a contradiction. Perhaps what is most striking in Hoy's analysis is his disregard (in this portion of his work) of the occurrences of *'em* that he has earlier noted in Rowley's unaided plays.

In the work of Jackson, Hoy, and other analysts of stylistic evidence, although occasional references to the complexities implicit to the task of making attributions do appear, there is an underlying tendency to disregard complexities. The possibility of scribal or compositorial intervention is mentioned only to be forgotten. The possibility that one playwright could consciously (or unconsciously) imitate (or be influenced by) another is just barely admitted. The possibility that there could be an additional collaborator, or significant changing by a later reviser or editor, does not get meaningful attention. Perhaps most important, there is a persistent, often unstated, assumption that collaboration always (or at least almost always) consisted of individual work on separable portions of a play. I believe that to a significant degree this probably misguided notion is attributable to the understandably major influence of Bentley, and particularly to what I believe to be Bentley's distortion of the evidence available in Henslowe's *Diary*.[10]

I am forced to note a striking inconsistency within Bentley's discussion of methods of collaboration (227–34). Bentley begins this seven-page section of his chapter on dramatic collaborations by admitting that there is little evidence and that such evidence as we do have suggests that various methods existed. Then, just one page into the section, without seeming to realize it, he takes an astonishing left turn against the oncoming traffic:

> But there is one method of collaboration used by the playwrights in these years which is most frequently referred to and which was evidently so much more generally practiced then than now that it deserves discussion. Separate compo-

> sition of individual acts is a division of labor which was common from 1590 to 1642. (228)

Bentley says 'evidently' even though he had just said there is little evidence. As I am about to demonstrate, there is no evidence to support his assertion that following this method 'was common from 1590 to 1642'. And then Bentley devotes the remaining six pages of this section to this method only, a choice that I believe has contributed to misleading a whole generation of scholars influenced by Bentley's important work into believing they have seen evidence that 'separate composition of individual acts' by different playwrights was the normal method of collaboration by the professional dramatists of this period.

So what is the evidence that Bentley offers? His first example (228) is of a play that was published at the very beginning of Bentley's period, 1591, but actually was written for presentation at court in 1566 or 1567. It is important to note that while this play, *Tancred and Gismund*, probably was composed by the different writer for each act method, the writers involved were not professional dramatists but rather amateurs, 'the Gentlemen of the Inner Temple'. Second, Bentley provides three and a half pages of discussion of Henslowe materials. Bentley's exact wording seems important to quote:

> The many entries about payment for plays in Henslowe's diary are never explicit in assigning individual acts to the different collaborators [he's right, they are never explicit], but most of his serial payments are compatible with such composition, especially in the several instances where he pays one or two writers of a play in his early payments and adds others in his final payments. (228)

'Compatible with', yes. But Bentley is not even asserting here that he has found evidence that this method of composition was used by Henslowe's playwrights commonly – or even once.

The first specific example that Bentley gives in his pages devoted to the Henslowe materials is curious because the portion of the *Diary* that might provide the relevant evidence has not survived. The reference here is to the lost play, *The Isle of Dogs*, for which Thomas Nashe got into trouble. He quotes (229) from a later pamphlet by Nashe, in which Nashe says that he had begun the play, had written the induction and the first act, and then the company gave the play to others to finish. But there is no indication here of division by acts except in the sense that (if Nashe is telling the truth) Nashe wrote act 1 and not the other acts. The pamphlet provides no indication of what method of collaboration may have been used for the rest of the play.

Then Bentley returns to Henslowe's entries as follows:

> Three entries concerning the work of Ben Jonson and George Chapman certainly show composition by acts, but it is not clear that only one play is involved or that Jonson and Chapman worked together. (229)

The first of these entries, dated 3 December 1597, refers only to Jonson, whom Henslowe lends 20 shillings on the basis of a plot that Jonson has shown to the company. The second, dated 23 October 1598, more than ten months later, may or may not (as Bentley admits) refer to the same play. Here Chapman receives a loan of three pounds 'on his play book and two acts of a tragedy of Benjamin's plot' (229). Then we come to the third entry (229–30), which is dated 4 January 1598 (really 1599), that is, two months later, which Bentley admits may or may not refer to the same play. Here Chapman receives a loan – there is no reference at all to Ben Jonson – of three pounds 'upon three acts of a tragedy'.

At this point, Bentley seems to have almost forgotten that he is discussing collaboration. He concludes his discussion of these three entries as follows: 'In any event, whether these three entries represent one, two, or possibly even three different plays, the wording shows that composition was proceeding by acts' (230). What is important to note here is that, even if Bentley is right in guessing that these three entries form a unit and actually refer to a single play, there is no substantial collaboration involved: Chapman wrote all five acts, yes, possibly one act at a time, and was paid in two installments. There is no question here of two playwrights dividing up a play into separable parts.

Then Bentley leaves the *Diary*, turning for his final Henslowe example (230–1) to correspondence between Henslowe and Robert Daborne in 1613. Here again, Bentley seems to be forgetting that his subject is methods of collaboration. The correspondence refers to two plays, *Machiavelli and the Devil* and *The Owl*. In each case it is clear that Daborne is being paid in installments. In neither case, however, is there any indication at all that Daborne has a collaborator, so again there is no support for Bentley's belief that he is demonstrating that 'separate composition of individual acts' by different playwrights was the normal method of collaboration by the professional dramatists of this period.

Before leaving his curious analysis of the Henslowe-Daborne correspondence, Bentley seems to notice that so far he has not been very convincing; and curiously he attaches to this admission an interesting piece of information:

> In most of the correspondence of Robert Daborne making allusion to joint compositions in which he was engaged with Massinger, Field, or Fletcher he makes no mention [n.b.] of the method by which they collaborated. But in a letter concerning his work with Cyril Tourneur he does say how they were working. (231)

The letter indicates that to meet his deadline Daborne has 'given Cyril Tourneur an act of *The Arraignment of London* to write'. That's it. This is Bentley's only example so far of a professional dramatist's being assigned a separable piece of a play. And it is a stopgap measure, not a planned one. Confronted with several deadlines at once, Daborne sought help from Tourneur in this particular way so that he could satisfy the demands of the entrepreneur with the money.

At this point, Bentley interrupts his superficial consideration of historical evidence to refer, very briefly, to linguistic evidence, especially to the work of Hoy, whose conclusions he seems to accept uncritically. Then, having, he hopes, buttressed his 'argument', he devotes the final two pages of this section (232–4) to evidence from a lawsuit about a 1624 play that had the title *The Late Murder of the Son upon the Mother* and the subtitle, which apparently referred to the play's subplot, *Keep the Widow Waking*. Bentley refers to the testimony of Thomas Dekker, one of those accused of slandering the mother-in-law of Benjamin Garfield, noting Dekker's explanation that he wrote act 1 and a speech in the last scene of the last act. Bentley assumes, on the basis of what he regards as an 'equable division' , that Ford, Webster, and William Rowley each contributed a whole act and 'a scene or a long speech in the last act' (234). Once again, it is clear that Bentley is offering speculation in place of evidence. That is, even if Dekker is telling the truth about the limits of his own contribution, we have no information at all about how the rest of the play was put together.

In short, the only real piece of evidence offered by Bentley that professional dramatists during his period ever collaborated by the method of assigning separate acts to different playwrights is the marginal case where Daborne gave Tourneur an act of *The Arraignment of London* under emergency conditions.

Now some of my readers may be asking themselves whether, having actually found good evidence in the Henslowe material, Bentley was merely careless in choosing his examples from the mass of material he had studied. I believe not. As I have already indicated, and as Bentley himself says, Henslowe never refers explcitly to paying someone for an act. I have looked carefully for wording that could be construed as suggestive of the possibility of a hint at such an

arrangement. In the entire Foakes and Rickert volume, I find only two such passages. By my count, there are 160 other passages where arrangements for collaborative playwrighting are referred to; and so Henslowe had 160 other places where there was an an opportunity for wording that would hint at paying dramatists by the act. Let me say that again: out of 162 opportunities there are only two where Henslowe chose words that to me suggest some kind of possibility of reading into Henslowe's language a hint at dividing the work by acts.[11]

I don't want to be misunderstood. Nowhere does Henslowe's language deny the possibility of his paying playwrights by the act. But the belief of Bentley and others that such an arrangement was common certainly is not in any way supported by the evidence in the Foakes and Rickert volume. To demonstrate my point, I will now provide some representative samples.

First we have the entries regarding the *Funeral of Richard Coeur de Lion* by Robert Wilson, Henry Chettle, Anthony Munday, and Michael Drayton.

13 June 1598	5 shillings to Wilson
14 June	5 shillings to Chettle
15 June	5 shillings to Chettle
17 June	15 shillings to Chettle, Wilson, Munday
21 June	25 shillings to Chettle
23 June	20 shillings to Munday
24 June	30 shillings to Drayton
26 June	20 shillings to Wilson ('*for his parte*')
totals:	Chettle – 40 shillings
	Wilson – 30 shillings
	Drayton – 30 shillings
	Munday – 25 shillings

We cannot, of course, be sure that money did not change hands in some way not recorded by Henslowe. All of the entries use the term 'lent', and most use the phrase 'in earneste' – which suggests that Henslowe was in this case giving his dramatists advances.

I call attention to the fact that this is one of the two instances that I counted as containing even the barest hint of paying a dramatist for a separable piece of a play.[12] That is, since Henslowe referred to lending Wilson 20 shillings for *his part* of the play, I decided to be cautious and admit that he could have been referring to a separable part of the play rather than just his part in a joint effort. Certainly

I see nothing else in this set of entries that is even remotely suggestive of the arrangement that so many scholars have declared to be the norm.

Examples of more typical entries – in which there is no hint of paying different playwrights for separable pieces of a play – follow:

Black Bateman of the North (Part I and Part II)

Part I

undated	20 shillings to Chettle
22 May 1598	6 pounds to Wilson, Drayton, Dekker, Chettle

Part II

26 June 1598	20 shillings to Chettle
8 July	3 pounds to Chettle
13 July	10 shillings to Wilson
14 July	15 shillings to Wilson
14 July	15 shillings to Chettle

totals for Part II:

Chettle – 4 pounds, 15 shillings
Wilson – 25 shillings

Madman's Morris

31 June 1598	3 pounds to Wilson, Drayton, Dekker
9 July	20 shillings to Drayton
	40 shillings to Wilson & Dekker

totals: Wilson – 2 pounds
Drayton – 2 pounds
Dekker – 2 pounds

The Stepmother's Tragedy

24 July 1599	10 shillings to Dekker
23 August	20 shillings to Chettle & Dekker
25 August	20 shillings to Chettle
14 October	4 pounds to Chettle

totals: Chettle – 5 pounds, 10 shillings
Dekker – 1 pound

Pierce of Winchester

undated	10 shillings to Dekker
8 August 1598	50 shillings to Drayton, Wilson, Dekker
10 August	50 shillings to Drayton, Wilson, Dekker

totals:	5 pounds divided among Drayton, Wilson, & Dekker
+	an additional 10 shillings to Dekker

Seven Wise Masters

1 March 1599	40 shillings to Chettle, Dekker, Haughton, Day
8 March	50 shillings to Chettle & Day
2 March	30 shillings to Chettle
totals:	Chettle – 3 pounds, 5 shillings
	Day – 1 pound, 15 shillings
	Dekker – 10 shillings
	Haughton – 10 shillings

Six Yeomen of the West

20 May 1601	15 shillings to Haughton
21 May	20 shillings to Day
4 June	40 shillings to Day
6 June	15 shillings to Haughton
8 June	30 shillings to Haughton
totals:	Haughton – 3 pounds
	Day – 3 pounds

In none of these cases is the possibility of act-by-act division denied – but why should it be? Certainly in none of these instances can I find any hint of the act-by-act arrangement.

I now move back to *The Changeling* and the question of its joint authorship. As I have said, I find nothing in the historical record that has survived to indicate the likelihood of the conventional belief about the play's authorship, no external evidence at all to support that conventional belief, and, despite the amount of effort by reputable scholars over a long period of time, no rigorous, careful examination of the internal evidence that I can regard as convincing. In my view, emphasis on the spelling of individual words, even contractions, represents an extreme example of critical misdirection: such criticism is considering how a play is 'written'. I said at the beginning of this essay that I would return to that problematic word. I believe that many critics dealing with this play never really consider some fairly obvious aspects of the craft of play*wrighting*. I wish that they would remember that the root of the word deals not with writing but with making.

The students of the play who offer the least are those most fixed on assigning shares. Those who are most helpful are those who manage, even while

persisting in the assignment of shares on the basis of insufficient evidence, to occasionally recognize a more meaningful kind of interaction between the two playwrights. Among these are Symons, Barber, and, especially, Mooney.

As I see it, the apparent consensus that has formed around the late nineteenth-century assignment of shares in *The Changeling* is actually less solid than it seems at first. I am not thinking merely of the one genuine iconoclast, W.D. Dunkel, who suggests that Rowley was the re-writer of Middleton's play, rather than an actual collaborator.[13] Symons divides the authorship of the play in something like the familiar way, but has also a vision of a unified play that is the work of two playwrights working together:

> The play is De Flores, and De Flores seems to grow greater as he passes from one to the other of the two playwrights, as they collaborate visibly at his creation. This great creation isS the final result and justification of Middleton and Rowley's work in common; for it is certain that De Flores as he is would never have been possible either to Rowley or to Middleton alone.[14]

Even though Symons' overall inclination is to think of the composition of the play in terms of separable parts, he sees the parts coming together in a way that can illuminate the whole play for his readers.

A somewhat similar situation exists with C.L. Barber, who at first glance is merely quibbling about which of the two playwrights is responsible for a particular word in a particular scene. He argues that the use of 'honour' to mean 'a bow, obeisance, curtsey' is much more frequent in plays definitely by Middleton than elsewhere in English Renaissance drama and on that basis offers the tentative conclusion 'that Middleton had a hand in act 4 scene 3 of *The Changeling*, which is usually attributed to Rowley alone'.[15] Along the way, however, Barber considers Dunkel's theory of Rowley as mere reviser, and the tendency of Schoenbaum and other authorities to dismiss Dunkel's view as unsupported. Barber manages to find unity in diversity and harmony in disagreement:

> It seems to me, however, that Dunkel's evidence is of some value.... Evidence of this kind is cumulative. On the other hand, Dunkel's resemblances [between the comic scenes in *The Changeling* and comic scenes in earlier comedies by Middleton] do not necessarily seem to me to support his thesis that Rowley was merely a reviser: they suggest that Middleton had a hand in the planning of the whole play, even of the scenes mainly written by Rowley. This view, which enables Dunkel's evidence to be harmonized with that for the orthodox view,

> assumes an intimate collaboration between Middleton and Rowley in their joint plays. (163–64)

That Barber can manage to agree with both Dunkel and Schoenbaum is useful. Even more useful is what I regard as the best treatment of the dual authorship of *The Changeling*, that of Michael E. Mooney.[16]

As with Barber's evaluation of Dunkel, my view of Mooney's essay is only partially accepting. To me, Mooney seems totally uncritical of the attribution of shares of the play to the two playwrights. He does not notice the absence of real evidence, and starts with the assumption that the conventional division – with Hoy's (in my view) unconvincing 'correction' – is accurate. Nevertheless, Mooney provides a sense of the whole play that is even more illuminating than that of Symons. And his sense of how the whole play was made by the playwrights is only incidentally dependent upon his faulty premise.

Mooney argues that, in their effort to elicit certain responses from the audience, Middleton and Rowley collaborated in a procedure of 'framing' the play. His effort is to show how the playwrights intertwine the tragic main plot and the comic subplot to enhance the effectiveness of both, how the madhouse scenes both contrast and echo the action of the tragic plot, how words and images of the two plots serve 'to recall and to mutually reinforce their separate actions' (305), how the playwright of act 1 (Mooney assumes it is Rowley) prepares the audience for the interweaving, how the playwright of act 5 (again, Rowley) fulfills the audience's complex anticipation through the use of language that brings together the concerns and the feelings of the tragic main plot and the comic subplot. Mooney really is attending not just to the writing down of words but to the craft of playwrighting.

Thus, more effectively than anyone else, Mooney accounts for the coherence and success of *The Changeling*, demonstrating how the play 'holds two modes in equipoise, the comic and the tragic, with the play's conclusion determined by the contrasting thrusts of comedy and tragedy' (311). Where Mooney goes wrong is not in his brilliant analysis of the structure of *The Changeling*, but in his assumption that that structure was created at least initially (he does speculate that Middleton and Rowley may have consulted together after the initial composition of the play) by two playwrights' writing their separate pieces. As I have suggested, the authorities upon whom Mooney depends for his assumption are involved in speculation – because of the absence of real evidence. In concluding, Mooney writes of 'a plan of operation that recognized the need for a unified tone at the beginning and at the end of a collaborative work'. He says that 'the interconnections among plots, characters, and con-

cepts might then be initially sketched by one hand and finally reinforced, without a loss of consistency, by bringing main and subplots into harmonic conjunction' (312). For Mooney, it seems almost necessary – in order to maintain consistency – for the hand that is writing act 5 to be the same hand that wrote act 1; in this aspect of his essay he neglects the craft of playwrighting in favor of what must be speculation about the chronology of the act performed by two people in writing down a series of words that happen to constitute a play.

To be sure, Mooney and the others may be right in their speculative allocation of parts of *The Changeling* to two playwrights. It is not my intention to argue that they are wrong; rather, I contend that the evidence does not exist to support the assumption, the speculation, that Middleton wrote X and Rowley wrote Y and no third playwright was involved.

Since speculation seems so endemic in this particular aspect of the study of Renaissance drama, I should like to offer some speculation of my own. Recalling my very first quotation from Schoenbaum about 'popular assumptions and facile generalizations about the nature of Elizabethan dramatic collaboration', I wish to speculate about a possible alternative assumption: that Renaissance playwrights who were collaborating, at least some of the time, and probably often, actually worked together. I believe that our knowledge about the authorship of *The Booke of Sir Thomas Moore* supports my assumption.[17] Another instance of apparent working together is cited by Carson, who finds in Henslowe's papers (not the Diary) a statement by Daborne about his collaboration on a play with Massinger and Nathan Field; Daborne says that they spent 'a great deale of Time in conference about [the] plott'.[18]

In any case, I emphasize my awareness of my own assumptions and speculations. In the at least temporary, probably permanent, absence of evidence, why not? Specifically, I am speculating that the reason my students find *The Changeling* to be a unified and coherent play is that the two playwrights actually worked together. I will not go so far as to suggest which of the many possible models of collaboration they followed.[19] But I will suggest that they probably talked with each other while they were making their play, that some of the time they may have been in the same room while a part of the play was being made (or written), that they could have influenced each other in ways that Middleton and Rowley themselves might have had trouble describing to another person. I do not claim that Renaissance plays were never cut up into pieces, each piece to be written by a different author; but I can say that I have found no external evidence whatsoever that this strange event ever happened in the professional theatre of the time.

When my students and I read *The Changeling* together, we find a play marked by a thematic consistency that makes the concept of two playwrights working independently of each other on separate shares of the play seem highly improbable. The complex way in which act 2, scene 2, and act 3, scene 3, play off against each other, and then together lead to the climactic act 3, scene 4, provides a good example of dramaturgically successful interweaving. In the earlier (main plot) scene, the unnoticed De Flores observes the intimacy of an encounter between Beatrice and Alsemero. His mind jumps quickly to the possibility that Beatrice will be unfaithful to her intended husband, and concludes that such a lapse on her part would justify De Flores' attempting to have a sexual relationship with his master's wife. In the later (subplot) scene, Lollio's entry above enables him to observe Tony's attempt to seduce Isabella. Again we have a servant quickly assuming that his mistress may be unfaithful – again concluding that misbehavior with one man could lead to misbehavior with the observer.

Lollio's attempt in this scene to kiss Isabella serves as an interesting preparatory foil to the act 3, scene 4, attempt by De Flores to kiss Beatrice. In the literal madhouse, the vulnerable woman is allowed by the playwrights to avert the unwanted kiss and escape from disaster. In the madhouse that is the castle, averting the unwanted kiss provides only momentary escape – since the heroine has made her vulnerability absolute through the tragic error that she has already committed. While there is no way of proving that Middleton and Rowley worked together on these three scenes, in the total absence of evidence that Middleton created the two main plot scenes while Rowley was working independently on the subplot scene, I find the sitting-in-the-same-room-and-talking-together speculation much easier to accept than the assumption that the two playwrights worked separately and put the pieces together afterwards.

If I am right that we do not – and almost certainly will not ever – know details about the collaborative authorship of *The Changeling* and other Renaissance plays, what consequence does that lack of knowledge have for interpretation? Clearly there is great consequence for any critic who wishes to study the art and craft of a particular playwright. For such interpreters I can only recommend an attempt to avoid being captured by what Jack Stillinger calls 'the myth of solitary genius'.[20] For all kinds of interpretation, I do believe it to be very important for scholars to pay attention to the evidence, to avoid reaching definitive conclusions that the available evidence cannot support.[21] In other words, in the absence of surprising new information, I recommend that we learn to live with the certainty that our knowledge is uncertain.

As I review the state of published work in the area of attribution studies, I see bad news and good news. One aspect of bad news is that in this age of instant communication we do not seem to be very good at transmitting and receiving the news about what is being learned. For instance, most people who care about the drama of this period will never read this essay. Also, someone who does not read it but rather hears about it from someone else will retain his or her earlier opinion because received opinion has a way of staying with us – despite the evidence. This problem applies equally to me as someone who does not always learn about the useful material written by other scholars. When I was working on a much briefer version of this essay in 1996, I believed I was all alone in questioning the validity of Hoy's approach. When I read a 1997 article by Jeffrey Masten, an article that to my mind demolishes Hoy almost completely, I said to myself: good, someone agrees with me. It was only when I returned to this subject three years later that I discovered that Masten's 1997 attack on Hoy first appeared in 1992.[22] I had a respectable reason for not knowing, in 1996, about Masten's 1992 article. I was working on Middleton and Rowley. Masten was exposing the weakness of Hoy's work on the Beaumont and Fletcher canon. But the problem remains, partly because so much more is being published than anyone has the time to read. As I indicated at the very beginning, Bawcutt's 1998 edition of *The Changeling* is still totally accepting of the traditional attribution and of Hoy's work. So that's the bad news, that we don't learn about each other's work fast enough, and sometimes not at all.

The first aspect of good news is that so many people are doing so much work that they genuinely care about. The second aspect of good news is that, while continuing to seek for more information, while continuing to look for The Truth, we really can do without certain knowledge. There remains value in the process of seeking. In most respects, it seems to me we are not in such bad shape. In writing about Renaissance plays, or in talking about the plays with our students and colleagues, we can refer to what 'the playwright' is doing or to what 'the playwrights' are doing. We can even pick a name for the sake of convenience – just so long as we remember to tell *our* audience that when we say 'Middleton' or 'Rowley' or 'Gezinkus' we don't necessarily mean an actual person by that name who lived and worked at a certain time several centuries ago – but rather a single or double or triple or quadruple human entity that somehow bears the responsibility for the text of (in this case) *The Changeling* that we happen to be reading and discussing at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The complexities here are potentially enormous. As D.C. Greetham explains in fascinating detail, defining 'a work', 'a text', 'an author' is no simple matter. For me, such decisions are often pragmatic ones determined by context. Greetham quotes Davison on pragmatic necessity: '"most of us, however assiduous we may be in leaving no stone unturned in checking the text with which we are concerned, must take on trust, to some extent at least, the work of others on other texts and problems"'. (And notice that I am trusting Greetham to give me the quotation from Davison correctly, and not to distort it by taking it out of context.)[23] Recently, in teaching an undergraduate course in 'Tragedy', I included *The Changeling*, *Women Beware Women*, and *The Revenger's Tragedy* and used as a 'required text' for my students a Penguin edition that claims to contain five plays by Middleton. Because of the purposes of this particular course (my context), I was quite comfortable with this presentation of 'the texts' of these three plays to these students, most of whom were not majoring in English and none of whom had plans to study for a PhD in English. Of course, I did explain (very briefly) what we know and do not know about how these three plays were created. Presumably, however, my students' experience of the plays was affected by the particular nature of 'the text' that was presented to them – and by my explanation, which I suppose became part of 'the text' as they became engaged with it.

The point I am making here, which is that at least with *The Changeling* we should value textual authority rather than authorial authority, is, I think, identical to the main point of Stephen Orgel's essay, 'What Is a Text?', which was first published in 1981. Influenced by Bentley (but his point does not depend on the weakness I have identified in Bentley) and especially by Honigmann, Orgel argues against an emphasis on authorial authority, suggesting that we should take a Renaissance dramatic text on its own terms, without worrying, or at least without worrying in the wrong way, about the impossible task of finding out exactly how, by exactly whose agency, it got that way. That is, while of course we want to remove errors, the correct text that we will ultimately be dealing with ordinarily does not derive its authority from its author or authors; rather, it derives its authority from its existence as a performance text. Orgel, whose focus is primarily on the essentially collaborative nature of plays that have only one playwright, urges us to accept as a necessary fact 'that at the heart of our texts lies a hard core of uncertainty'.[24]

This kind of problem is addressed, in different ways, by Masten and by McMullan. Among other interesting points made by Masten is his warning (I like this point especially because we are always gratified to see in print ideas

that we have been expressing in class) against 'the modern critical model of authorial development that dwells upon "date of composition"', a model that leads, for instance, to lists of Shakespeare's plays in chronological order ('Beaumont' 376). Masten, like Orgel, sees the text of a play in a performance context, emphasizing the various ways in which the text could, legitimately, change subsequent to its originally being put together by its original playwright(s).

McMullan, whose focus is on the plays of John Fletcher, and who in my judgment is too accepting of the methods of Hoy, takes Masten mildly to task for his Foucaultian rejection of the author – preferring to invoke Bakhtin:

> I prefer to argue, with Bakhtin, for the distinctiveness of the individual as an *orchestrator* of voices. In other words, while there is no such thing as original speech – all words have always already been previously voiced in some context or other ... – there is nonetheless a role for the voice in organizing the innumerable discursive options available at a particular moment. This organization or orchestration can be distinctive without requiring belief in romantic notions of originality. And promoting collaboration is one way of demonstrating the profoundly social, dialogic nature of discourse, which does not deny (though it makes impossible, finally) the attempt to locate a working distinctiveness for the orchestrator of voices, influences, sources, and contexts known to literary history as Fletcher.[25]

In other words, because he is studying Fletcher, he necessarily, and rightly it seems to me, objects to Masten's implication that such a project is inappropriate. Nevertheless, he winds up admitting the impossibility of separating out 'Fletcher', or, to get back to the subject of this essay, 'Middleton' or 'Rowley', from the text of a play. McMullan's discussion of collaboration is complex. Ultimately he demonstrates the inevitability, and therefore the rightness, of the scholarly attempt to answer unanswerable questions. I will give the last word to Schoenbaum who asserts that 'we want to know', who playfully suggests that 'something there is that doesn't love an anonymous play' (218).

Notes

1 Frederick Gard Fleay, *A Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama, 1559–1642*, 2 vols.(London, 1891). Pauline Wiggin, *An Inquiry into the Authorship of the Middleton-Rowley Plays*, Radcliffe College Monographs 9

(Boston, 1897). N.W. Bawcutt (ed), *The Changeling*, by Thomas Middleton & William Rowley, Revels Student Editions (Manchester, 1998).

2 Samuel Schoenbaum, *Internal Evidence and Elizabethan Dramatic Authorship: An Essay in Literary History and Method* (Evanston, 1966).

3 Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Profession of Dramatist in Shakespeare's Time, 1590–1642* (Princeton, 1971) 210; see also 232–4.

4 George Walton Williams (ed), *The Changeling*, by Thomas Middleton and William Rowley (Lincoln, 1966), xi.

5 N.W. Bawcutt (ed), *The Changeling*, by Thomas Middleton & William Rowley, The Revels Plays (Cambridge, 1958), xvi.

6 David J. Lake, *The Canon of Thomas Middleton's Plays: Internal Evidence for the Major Problems of Authorship* (London, 1975), 20.

7 Those who have regarded *The Birth of Merlin* as the unaided work of Rowley presumably have assumed that the presence of Shakespeare's name as joint author is the only error on the 1662 title page.

8 Cyrus Hoy, 'The Shares of Fletcher and his Collaborators in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon (V)', *Studies in Bibliography* 13 (1960), 82–3.

9 MacD. P. Jackson, *Studies in Attribution: Middleton and Shakespeare* (Salzburg, Austria, 1979), 119–20.

10 Kathleen E. McLuskie, for instance, appears to be following Bentley; see 'The Plays and the Playwrights: 1613–42', in *The Revels History of Drama in English* (London, 1981), vol. 4, 169–82.

11 Philip Henslowe, *Henslowe's Diary*, R.A. Foakes and R.T. Rickert (eds) (Cambridge, 1961).

12 For the other, see Henslowe's *Diary*, 135 and 294 (references to *Fair Constance of Rome, Part I* by Munday, Drayton, Hathaway, Dekker, and Wilson).

13 W.D. Dunkel, 'Did Not Rowley Merely Revise Middleton?', *PMLA* 48 (1933), 799–805.

14 Arthur Symons, 'Middleton and Rowley', *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. 6, 87.

15 C.L. Barber, 'A Rare Use of "Honour" as a Criterion of Middleton's Authorship', *English Studies* 38 (1957), 168.

16 Michael E. Mooney, '"Framing" as Collaborative Technique: Two Middleton-Rowley Plays,' in *Drama in the Renaissance: Comparative and Critical Essays*, Clifford Davidson, C.J. Gianakaris, and John H. Stroupe (eds), (New York, 1986), 300–14.

17 See, for instance, Peter W.M. Blayney, '*The Booke of Sir Thomas Moore* Re-Examined', *Studies in Philology* 69 (1972), 167–91; and Carol A. Chill-

ington, 'Playwrights at Work: Henslowe's, Not Shakespeare's, *Book of Sir Thomas More*', *English Literary Renaissance* 10 (1980), 439–79.

18 Neil Carson, *A Companion to Henslowe's Diary* (Cambridge, 1988), 55.

19 Sheldon P. Zitner gives an interesting list of possibilities for modes of collaboration: 'prior agreement on outline, vetting of successive drafts by a partner, composition in concert, brief and possibly infrequent intervention, and even a mutual contagion of style' in 'Introduction', *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* by Francis Beaumont, The Revels Plays (Manchester, 1984), 10.

20 Jack Stillinger, *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (New York and Oxford, 1991).

21 The January 1996 issue of *PMLA* attempts to contextualize scholars' use of evidence, and their criticism of other scholars' misuse of evidence, in both theoretical and practical terms. Readers of Heather Dubrow's introductory essay to that issue will probably gather that I am a proponent of what she refers to as 'solid' criticism. I hope that I may be – at the same time – in favor of criticism that manages also to be 'fruitful', 'provocative', and, yes, even 'interesting'. See 'The Status of Evidence', *PMLA* 111 (1996), 16–17.

22 Jeffrey Masten, 'Playwrighting: Authorship and Collaboration', in *A New History of Early English Drama*, John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (eds), (New York, 1997). 'Beaumont and/or Fletcher: Collaboration and the Interpretation of Renaissance Drama,' *ELH* 59 (1992), 337–56.

23 D.C. Greetham, 'Textual Forensics', *PMLA* 111 (1996), 42. See also Peter Davison, 'The Selection and Presentation of Bibliographical Evidence,' *Analytical and Enumerative Bibliography* 1 (1977), 101–36.

24 Stephen Orgel, 'What Is a Text?', in *Staging the Renaissance: Reinterpretations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama*, David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass (eds) (New York, 1991), 83. For a more theoretical discussion of the issues addressed by Orgel, see Greetham, who points out that the various definitions of the word 'text' include two basically contradictory meanings: text as something woven, with texture, the 'style, tissue of a literary work'; and text as 'an orginal or authority' (Greetham 32–33). Orgel's view is that, at least for performance-based dramatic texts of the Renaissance, we need to reject the latter definition. See also E.A.J. Honigmann, *The Stability of Shakespeare's Text* (London, 1965).

25 Gordon McMullan, *The Politics of Unease in the Plays of John Fletcher* (Amherst, 1994), 155.