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**The Author as Nobody?**  
**Some Reflections on Modern Authorship on the Occasion of**  
*Shakespeare in Love*

Christoph Reinfandt

**I. Introduction**

Let me begin in a somewhat oppositional manner by stating that in spite of the fact that the contributions to the present volume are supposed to discuss the topic *Drama and Cultural Change*, my contribution will perhaps be more about *Drama and Cultural Continuity*. Of course I am well aware of the fact that the reception of the works of William Shakespeare had its ups and downs, and that the modes of reception were framed by changing cultural fashions through the centuries.<sup>1</sup> However, in terms of both quantity and quality, 'Shakespeare' (metonymically speaking) has certainly been the most persistently influential factor in English literature and beyond. When many people to this day are intrigued by the lives of the Brontë sisters and wonder how it is possible that "three spinsters with no experience of sex [did] write about passion with such conviction,"<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare's life poses a similar question on a more fundamental (and less intimate) level: how is it possible that a writer at the turn from the 16th to the 17th century with no experience of the coming four centuries could write about the emerging modern and even 'post-modern' concepts of self, gender, love, politics, history, nation etc. with such conviction that his work has fascinated both specialists and wider audiences to this day? A possible answer which has found wide acceptance these days is the observation that Shakespeare's works have their origins in the semi-literary sphere of Elizabethan theatre, a fact which, on the one hand, guarantees a degree of non-capital-c 'low-brow' cultural authority in terms of entertainment and practical adaptability. In terms of capital-C 'high-brow' Cultural Authority, on the other hand, Shakespeare has certainly profited from later appropriations by clarifying classicists, reading Romantics, mystifying modernists and de-mystifying postmodernists.

**II. Shakespeare in Academia**

While it is perfectly possible to describe all this in purely historicist and historicised terms, there is one ingredient which cannot be disregarded: whoever Shakespeare was, he must have had outstanding abilities and an outstanding sensitivity for cultural mat-

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1 Cf. Gary Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History from the Restoration to the Present* (London: Hogarth, 1990).

2 Lucasta Miller, "Force of Characters," *Times Literary Supplement* (Nov 25, 2005): 17.

ters, and so, even after years of debunking the Romantic cult of genius, there is still enough astonishment and veneration left to keep both academic and popular interest in Shakespeare as an empirical person not only alive, but alive and kicking, even to the point of fully-fledged conspiracy theories. When, for example, in a review entitled "Idle Worship" published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in August 2005, Brian Vickers engaged in a thorough job of demolishing four of the latest books trying to identify Shakespeare as either Francis Bacon, Christopher Marlowe or Edward de Vere by meticulously summing up the state of the scholarship in the field which makes all these claims look fairly ridiculous, the futility of his efforts was nicely illustrated by the fact that only a couple of pages later in the very same issue of the *TLS* a huge ad announced the arrival of the next book with the title *The Truth Will Out: Unmasking the Real Shakespeare*; this one, it turns out, opting for Sir Henry Neville, and, as the reviewer in the November 25 issue of the *TLS* points out, similarly "long on enthusiasm but uncontrolled by the rigour of scholarship."<sup>3</sup>

In spite of all this, however, 'the real Shakespeare,' i.e. the person from Stratford whose biographical data are "a matter of well-documented public record"<sup>4</sup> and can be found in every Shakespeare handbook, proves to be as elusive as the link between the documentary record and the literary record remains tenuous.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the personality of 'the real Shakespeare' turns out to be so elusive that even the world's most renowned Shakespeare scholar, arguably Stephen Greenblatt, and the world's most renowned literary biographer, arguably Peter Ackroyd, run into trouble with their respective attempts at getting at it. Ackroyd, for example, never too reticent about his abilities, promises in his biography of Shakespeare not only 'a biography' in the sense of 'yet another biography' but no less than "The Biography" of William Shakespeare.<sup>6</sup> However, the missing links between the life and the work lure him into a procedure in which, as one critic harshly puts it, "[p]resumption, supposition and speculation in a series of passive or abstracted sentences lead directly to expectation."<sup>7</sup> What is more, and surprisingly so in view of the trouble taken, the resulting "vague tissue of imaginative guesswork" with its "reluctance to quote or even to get too close to the details of the plays" seems to present Shakespeare as "very ordinary, not only because he is a

3 Cf. Brian Vickers, "Idle Worship," *Times Literary Supplement* (Aug 19, 2005): 6-8, and Alan H. Nelson, Rev. of *The Truth Will Out*. *Times Literary Supplement* (Nov 25, 2005): 28.

4 Stephen Greenblatt, *Will In the World: How Shakespeare became Shakespeare* (New York: Norton, 2004) 12.

5 What is more, even the link between portraits of Shakespeare and the real Shakespeare remains tenuous, as an exhibition entitled *Searching for Shakespeare* in the National Portrait Gallery in London demonstrated in early 2006. Cf. Katherine Duncan-Jones, "Fame in a Feigned Oval: The Face Behind the Actor Behind the Genius of Poetry," *Times Literary Supplement* (March 17, 2006): 16-17.

6 Peter Ackroyd, *Shakespeare: The Biography* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2005).

7 Peter Holland, "An Unplucked Heart," *Times Literary Supplement* (Oct 28, 2005): 24-25, 24.

man whose ambitions stretch no further than a large house in his home town and a series of safe investments, but because his mind is not all that interesting either."<sup>8</sup>

Stephen Greenblatt, on the other hand, adopts the opposite approach, and yet something similar happens in his *Will In the World*, which was published in 2004. As opposed to Ackroyd, who focuses on the life and ends up saying rather little about the works, Greenblatt's tackling of 'Shakespeare,' the "amazing success story that has resisted explanation"<sup>9</sup> uses the works to read the life, as it were. This new focus has not only led to an, for a scholar of Greenblatt's stature, astonishing number of factual errors, as has been pointed out in a number of reviews,<sup>10</sup> but also to a surprising result: instead of, in an extension of the New Historicist approach for which he is justly famous, reading 'Shakespeare' as an instantiation of the "circulation of social energy" beyond the contemporaneous framework of Renaissance England at which much New Historicist ingenuity was directed,<sup>11</sup> he goes off in search of Shakespeare, the person as detectable in his works through assumed remnants of a factual, experiential and biographical basis in his life. This biographical procedure, Christoph Bode has pointed out, is "self-contradictory and self-cancelling" in at least two ways<sup>12</sup>: Firstly, it relegates the otherwise much propagated view that Shakespeare must have been "a man unusually gifted with *imagination*" very much to the background and thus does not take into account the full absurdity of deducing "any experience that we have no knowledge of from [Shakespeare's] imaginative works." And secondly, it reduces and marginalizes "the very complexity for which Shakespeare's oeuvre was singled out and praised in the first place" so that, paradoxically and unconvincingly, a "reduction to the quotidian is then presented as an 'explanation' of the greatness of the plays."<sup>13</sup> In the end, then, Greenblatt ends up with a rather unremarkable person not unlike the Shakespeare of Ackroyd's biography, and this is apparently the prize one has to pay for

8 Holland, "An Unplucked Heart" 24-25.

9 Greenblatt, *Will In the World* 12.

10 See, for example, Alastair Fowler, "Enter Speed," *Times Literary Supplement* (Feb 4, 2005): 3-5, and Peter Holland, "Mystery Man," *New York Review of Books* (Dec 16, 2004): 36-38.

11 Cf. Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: U of California P, 1988), and, for a concise overview, Eckhard Auberlen, "New Historicism," *Literaturwissenschaft in Theorie und Praxis: Eine anglistisch-amerikanistische Einführung*, ed. Ralf Scheider (Tübingen: Narr, 2004) 83-115.

12 Christoph Bode, "'The utmost that we know': The Subject of (Auto)-Biography (Shakespeare – Wordsworth – Brooke-Rose – Bob Dylan)," *Anglistentag 2005 Bamberg: Proceedings*, ed. Christoph Houswitschka, Gabriele Knappe, Anja Müller (Trier: WVT, 2006) 375-85, 377. On a more general note, Bode calls Greenblatt's method a "biographical procedure that is not a hermeneutic circle at all but a logically flawed hocus-pocus, and a vicious circle at best [...]. Methodologically, this is pseudo-hermeneutics."

13 Bode, "The utmost " 377-78.

living and writing in an age in which the maxim "Always historicize!" sits uneasily with the undisputable facts of 'cultural greatness'.<sup>14</sup>

Beyond that, however, it is also a cost incurred by the principles of communication under modern conditions. And, while the academic commentators seem to have moved themselves into a corner where their credentials in terms of theoretical consistency (in Greenblatt's case) or biographical proficiency (in Ackroyd's case) on the one hand and their interest in Shakespeare as an outstanding personality on the other seem to be barely negotiable (in a Greenblattian sense), there are non-academic instances of a lighter but not necessarily more inadequate response to the conundrum. As Christoph Bode points out in his critique of Greenblatt's *Will In the World*, the "error [...] to presuppose that anything in Shakespeare's works must have a factual, experiential, 'biographical' basis in his life" is "unpardonable in a scholar of Greenblatt's stature" but "foregiveable in *Shakespeare in Love*".<sup>15</sup> In what follows I will take my cue from Bode and focus on one particular four-minute scene in the successful movie scripted by Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard, a scene which, I propose, stages the problems at the heart of Greenblatt's and Ackroyd's difficulties much more lucidly than their combined academic credentials enabled them to do.<sup>16</sup>

### III. *Shakespeare in Love*

The scene in question takes place about a third into the film. It is the first day of rehearsals for William Shakespeare's new play at the Rose Theatre in London. Much of the play, the film audience knows, is as yet unwritten, because Will has been suffering from severe writer's block, which is only gradually dissolved by his acquaintance with Viola De Lesseps. However, the first scenes are available after a bout of frenzied creativity the night before. The main characters in the order of their appearance are Philip Henslowe, the owner of the Rose Theatre, Will Shakespeare, Hugh Fennyman, a shady financier, and finally Ned Alleyn, the charismatic actor and leader of the Admiral's Men who have just returned to the city. All of these characters except Fennyman are historical characters, and the Rose Theatre is a historical playhouse. In fact, the film is

14 See the introduction and many of the contributions in Christoph Bode, Wolfgang Klooss (eds.), *Historicizing/Contemporizing Shakespeare* (Trier: WVT, 2000).

15 Bode, "The utmost" 377.

16 A similar discrepancy is observed in a review of academic work on Shakespeare and popular culture: When in one of the books under review the writer pontificates "'We might see *Shakespeare in Love* as addressing a crisis in the image of Shakespeare'" the reviewer retorts: "We might also see it as extraordinarily funny, but no hint of this emerges in a four-page exegesis." Ralph Berry, "Topical Pops," *Times Literary Supplement* (Mar 28, 2003): 24. See also, more generally, Richard Burt, "*Shakespeare in Love* and the End of the Shakespearean: Academic and Mass Culture Constructions of Literary Authorship," *Shakespeare, Film, Fin de Siècle*, ed. Mark Thornton Burnett, Ramona Wray (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000) 203-31, and Sarah Mayo, "'A Shakespeare for the People? Negotiating the Popular in *Shakespeare in Love* and Michael Hoffman's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," *Textual Practice* 17.2 (2003): 295-315.

famous for being alert to what academic writers had to say about Shakespeare and his times at the end of the 20th century. What the film strives for, among other things, then, is a staging of the intermingling of material conditions and cultural energies as outlined in the work of the New Historicists (Dr Stephen Greenblatt is indeed thanked in the final credits), but it also emancipates itself from these constraints in order to construct its fictional plot.<sup>17</sup>

The scene unfolds as follows<sup>18</sup>:

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. STAGE / AUDITORIUM.

DAY.

*It is day one. The Company is on stage. Peter is passing pages around a bunch of actors. John, James, and Nol are looking through their pages.*

JOHN. "Draw if you be men! (to James) Gregory, remember thy washing blow."

NOL. "Part, fools, put up your swords."

*Will is going around pumping hands and slapping shoulders, flushed with excitement. Henslowe is reading his pages, worried. Ralph Bashford is next to him.*

HENSLOWE. It starts well, and then it's all long-faced about some Rosaline. Where's the comedy, Will. Where's the dog? (to Ralph) Do you think it is funny?

RALPH. I was a Pirate King, now I'm a Nurse. That's funny.

*Will pulls Henslowe aside.*

WILL. We are at least six men short, and those we have will be overparted, ranters and stutterers who should be sent back to the stews. My Romeo has let me down. I see disaster.

HENSLOWE. We are at least four acts short, Will, if you are looking for disaster.

*Will notices a young scruffy thirteen-year-old actor, the Urchin we met before.*

WILL. Who are you, master?

URCHIN I am Ethel, sir, the Pirate's daughter.

WILL (*furiously*). I'll be damned if you are!

*And he helps the Urchin off with a kick. The Urchin glowers with resentment. Henslowe finds himself face to face with Fennyman.*

FENNYMAN. Is it going well?

HENSLOWE. Very well.

FENNYMAN. But nothing is happening.

HENSLOWE. Yes, but very well.

WILL (*shouts*). Gentlemen! Thank you! You are welcome.

FENNYMAN. Who is that?

HENSLOWE. Nobody. The author.

17 Cf. Elizabeth Klett, "*Shakespeare in Love* and the End(s) of History," *Retrovisions: Reinventing the Past in Fiction and Film*, ed. Deborah Cartnell, I. Q. Hunter, Imelda Whelehan (London/Sterling, Virginia: Pluto P, 2001) 25-40, who speaks of the "anachronistic spirit" of the film (26).

18 The script was published as Marc Norman, Tom Stoppard, *Shakespeare in Love: A Screenplay* (New York: Hyperion/Miramax Books, 1998). It is quoted from the following edition: Marc Norman, Tom Stoppard, *Shakespeare in Love: A Screenplay*, ed. Barbara Puschmann-Nalenz (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2000 [Reclam Fremdsprachentexte]) 50-54.

WILL. We are about to embark on a great voyage.

HENSLOWE. It is customary to make a little speech on the first day. It does no harm and authors like it.

WILL. You want to know what parts you are to receive. All will be settled as we go –

FENNYMAN. I'll do it. (*He jumps on the stage and takes over.*) Listen to me, you dregs! – actors are ten a penny, and I, Hugh Fennyman, hold your nuts in my hand –

*That's as far as he gets before there is a dramatic interruption – the public entrance door is flung open and Six Men make a loud entrance, headed by Ned Alleyn, the actor, who is a handsome piratical figure with a big voice and a big sword.*

ALLEYN. Huzzah! The Admiral's Men are returned to the house!

*He gets various reactions. Henslowe and Will shout his name joyfully, some of the actors are friends with the new group and behave accordingly, others know they are out of a job. Fennyman recovers, or tries to.*

FENNYMAN. Who is this?

*Alleyn slaps him aside with his sword.*

ALLEYN (*roars*). Silence, you dog! I am Hieronimo! I am Tamburlaine! I am Faustus! I am Barabas, the Jew of Malta – oh yes, Master Will, and I am Henry VI. What is the play, and what is my part?

*Fennyman is impressed.*

FENNYMAN. A moment, sir!

ALLEYN (*roars*). Who are you?

FENNYMAN (*bleating*). I am the money!

ALLEYN. Then you may remain so long as you remain silent. Pay attention and you will see how genius creates a legend.

FENNYMAN (*respectfully*). Thank you, sir.

WILL. We are in desperate want of a Mercutio, Ned, a young nobleman of Verona...

ALLEYN. And the title of this piece?

WILL. *Mercutio*.

HENSLOWE. Is it?

ALLEYN. I will play him!

*Half a dozen of the Admiral's Men will be given roles in our play and we meet them and identify them as Will enthusiastically shakes hands.*

WILL. Mr. Pope! Mr. Philips! Welcome, George Bryan! James Armitage! (*and now greeting Sam Gosse, the female star of the Admiral's Men.*) Sam! My pretty one! Are you ready to fall in love again?

SAM (*hoarsely*). I am, Master Shakespeare.

WILL (*concerned*). But your voice ... (*he thrusts a hand between Sam's legs*) Have they dropped?

SAM (*a girlier voice now*). No, no, a touch of cold only.

*We suspect he is lying but Will has turned away.*

WILL. Master Henslowe, you have your actors.

*He leaves, passing by the humbled Fennyman.*

FENNYMAN. I saw his Tamburlaine, you know. Wonderful.

WILL. Yes, I saw it.

FENNYMAN. Of course, it was mighty writing. There is no one like Marlowe.

*Will is used to it. He goes.*

The moments I am interested in take place a little bit into the scene, when the rehearsals are about to begin officially. They might be called moments of displacement: When Will opens up the proceedings with the little speech that is customary on the first day of rehearsals, he is benevolently ignored by the theatre owner ("It does no harm and authors like it") and immediately displaced by Fennyman, who, in direct contrast to Will's metaphoric opening salvo ("We are about to embark on a great voyage") insists on the material and economic realities in which the institution of theatre is embedded and in which his position of power is grounded. As he puts it: "I, Hugh Fennyman, hold your nuts in my hands –." Fennyman, however, is immediately displaced (or upstaged, one could say) by the entrance of Ned Alleyn, superstar. At first, Fennyman simply repeats the question that he asked Henslowe with regard to Shakespeare, but now there is less distance between him and the actor at this point than between him and the author a minute earlier: his question to Henslowe about Shakespeare – "Who is that?" – has been replaced by a similarly indirect "Who is this?" about Alleyn, a question, however, which is, in the uproar, no longer directed at anyone in particular. What is more, Fennyman's authority is not acknowledged at all this time. Alleyn "*slaps him aside with his sword*" and continues with theatrical matters from his position of ultimate theatrical power. When Fennyman interrupts him again, he bats his earlier questions back at him in a very direct manner ("Who are you?"), to which a by now impressed Fennyman answers, bleatingly as the stage directions point out: "I am the money." This in turn is acknowledged by Alleyn as a power position of sorts, but he stipulates expressively that Fennyman should "remain silent" while theatrical genius (his own, that is) "creates a legend."

At this point, the author William Shakespeare has all but completely vanished behind his medium, i.e. the theatre as embodied by the actors. He does no longer figure in Hugh Fennyman's perception of what is going on at all, while Ned Alleyn sees him as little more than a necessary prop, like the theatre and its owner and the money, a prop for the unfolding of *his* art. The film audience, however, realizes that Alleyn's conclusion to his exchange with Fennyman is ambiguous. From a later perspective, it is clear that Alleyn's "see how genius creates a legend" refers to Shakespeare rather than himself, and this is of course the plot of the film *Shakespeare in Love*: Will Shakespeare is the genius who creates the legend of *Romeo and Juliet*, which is shown, as in Greenblatt's and Ackroyd's studies, to have a factual, experiential, biographical basis in his life. As opposed to Greenblatt and Ackroyd, however, the film is deliberately and unblushingly fictional, and it acknowledges this in a subtle way by interpolating its own fictionality as the real-life basis for Shakespeare's creativity which in turn re-imagines aspects of his experience. So while the film partly suggests that William Shakespeare was, somewhat along the lines of the person assembled by Greenblatt and Ackroyd, "a fairly ordinary bloke who got his best lines from chance remarks overheard in street or tavern," as a film review puts it, it is nevertheless centred around "a further conceit" which posits that the reason for Shakespeare's "creative breakthrough is to be found in

a passionate love affair."<sup>19</sup> But then again, this love affair is an unashamedly fictional one, and it is on these grounds that the transformative power of the imagination is duly acknowledged, celebrated and, most importantly, staged by the film in a way that is strikingly absent from the academic efforts.

But to return to the scene – and to the question-mark in the title of this paper: so far we have witnessed the vanishing of the author behind the medium of the theatre, that is to say: even in a theatrical context which, in its very existence, is very much based on 'authored texts,' as many episodes in *Shakespeare in Love* illustrate, the author tends to be disregarded – once he has delivered the goods, that is. In the theatre, however, he can, if he cares to do so, still exert a certain amount of control, not only by means of more or less tolerated welcome speeches, but also by means of subtle manipulation. This is nicely illustrated as the scene proceeds, when Shakespeare manages to persuade Ned Alleyn to take the role of Mercutio in a dialogue of typical Stoppardian wit: When approached by Shakespeare who professes to be "in desperate want of a Mercutio [...], a young nobleman of Verona," Alleyn immediately demands the title of the play, to which Shakespeare unflinchingly (and playing up to Alleyn's vanity) answers "Mercutio," to which in turn Alleyn responds with a magnanimous "I will play him!" while Henslowe manages to interject a surprised "Is it?" which is, however, not taken in by Alleyn in his self-absorption. But then again, Shakespeare himself is shown to be somewhat self-absorbed when a moment later he fails to realize that his favourite boy actor Sam has grown out of his female roles so that his confident announcement "Master Henslowe, you have your actors" is clearly discernible to the film audience as being mistaken (though this will turn out to be a lucky mistake on Shakespeare's part, for it will in the end open up the space for the one and only authentic female performance of the role of Juliet by none other than Viola De Lesseps, with Shakespeare himself taking the role of Romeo).

At the end, however, whatever authority Shakespeare has attained in the course of the scene evaporates when a running gag of the film returns: Fennyman, still in awe of Ned Alleyn, addresses the passing Shakespeare with "I saw his Tamburlaine, you know. Wonderful," to which Shakespeare curtly replies: "Yes, I saw it." This in turn creates an opening for Fennyman's unwitting parting shot: "Of course, it was mighty writing. There is no one like Marlowe." Will, the stage directions comment, "is used to it. He goes." Here, all of a sudden, the author returns to the scene – but it is an absent author whose greatness is evoked. Greatness, then, does not reside in an author's presence, or existence, but in his writing, or, to put it more generally: modern culture revolves around writing, and it is only in writing that positions of authorship and author-

19 Cf. Katherine Duncan-Jones, "Why, then, O brawling love!" *Times Literary Supplement* (Feb 5, 1999): 18. For a critical reading of the love/consummation/authorship-motif at the heart of *Shakespeare in Love* against the background of the logic of emergent capitalism cf. Courtney Lehmann, "Shakespeare in Love: Romancing the Author, Mastering the Body," *Spectacular Shakespeare: Critical Theory and Popular Cinema*, ed. Courtney Lehmann and Lisa S. Starks (London: Associated UPs, 2002) 125-45.

ity can be obtained and secured, albeit at the cost of displacing the author as an empirical person into a transcendent cultural sphere. This displacement, however, is necessary in order to solve one of the fundamental cultural problems of modernity, i.e. the question as to how individual subjective experience (such as, for example, Shakespeare in love) can attain cultural relevance and authority, how it can assume a representative function and claim universal (or at least) broader validity.

In this respect, the film *Shakespeare in Love* comes up with a double-layered answer. On the one hand it suggests that the origins of Shakespeare's creativity lie in a self-empowerment grounded in his personal experience. On the other hand, the scene under discussion demonstrates quite clearly that the transferral of personal experience into public spheres of communication which lie beyond personal and immediate interaction cuts off the 'text' from its author. In the scene, the public sphere of the theatre is foregrounded, but it leaves no doubt that even then, i.e. in the fictional year 1593, writing is the basic medium of authorship. Even (or perhaps especially) in a case of extraordinarily successful communication between an author and his audience – and as such *Romeo and Juliet* is presented at the end of the film, where it assumes a representative role for all of Shakespeare's coming masterpieces – there is no way 'through' the veil of writing. Henceforth, the empirical author has a double existence: as a person whose link to his or her works is tenuous, and as a cultural cipher 'behind' the work, a cipher which can (and will) be saturated with biographical information (if it is available) in order to re-establish the link between the cultural and the individual; this can then be drawn upon in order to explain the existence of culture or even Culture (albeit with rather shallow results), or in order to reassuringly establish the presence of the universal in the contingency of individuality.

#### IV. Conclusion

Both *Shakespeare in Love* and the books by Stephen Greenblatt and Peter Ackroyd are but the most recent examples of this feedback process, and one could tentatively argue that the film is the more successful attempt because of its deliberate (meta-)fictionality which manages to have its cake and eat it, too.<sup>20</sup> All speculations about Shakespeare would be completely pointless, however, without the impulse of the texts that he left 'behind' (or rather 'before' him, perhaps), and they cannot reach 'behind' these texts or

20 On the parallel reinvention of British heritage cinema facilitated by tearing off the costumes in an affront to costume drama's tender sensibilities cf. Julianne Pidduck, "Elizabeth and Shakespeare in Love: Screening the Elizabethans," *Film / Literature / Heritage: A Sight and Sound Reader*, ed. Ginette Vincendeau (London: BFI, 2001) 130-35, and, with a similar thematic focus but a stronger emphasis on the historical dimension, Ian Mc Adam, "Fiction and Projection: The Construction of Early Modern Sexuality in *Elizabeth* and *Shakespeare in Love*," *Pacific Coast Philology* 35.1 (2000): 49-60. On the, in spite of all cross-dressing, decidedly, even essentialist heterosexual foundation of the film cf. Sujata Iyengar, "Shakespeare in HeteroLove," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 29.1 (2001): 122-27.

go back to a person 'before' them, as it were. The texts, that is to say, have left the author's realm of authority on publication, and have moved on into the audience's realm of authority, which is partly governed by a cultural continuity marked by a typically modern construction of cultural relevance and partly governed by temporal distance and cultural change. In the end, which is always now, in a sense, there are only individual acts of reception based on material traces of meaning, be it signs on the page or actors on the stage (or on the screen, for that matter).<sup>21</sup>

The author under modern conditions, then, is nobody and quite somebody at the same time, and Shakespeare is the most instructive example for this phenomenon. It could thus even make sense to credit Shakespeare with *The Invention of the Human* as Harold Bloom did a couple of years ago, if only one could manage to get rid of Bloom's universalizing implications and see the human in Shakespeare's and our sense as a cultural construction under specific media conditions, albeit a construction with a long and very successful historical pedigree and afterlife.<sup>22</sup> From this perspective Shakespeare's universality turns out to be a historically contingent fact that differs only in quality from the contingency of other people's existence.

On this note of contingency *and* continuity one could take the leap to our present times and end with something completely different and yet similar: in 1995, the Irish poet Brendan Kennelly published a long meta-poetical poem under the title *Poetry My Arse*. At the beginning of the volume, in a section entitled "Front Gate," the speaker, who turns out to be a poet called Brendan Kennelly, meets his fictional alter ego, the ageing poet Ace de Horner, at the Front Gate of Trinity College, Dublin. It turns out that de Horner is looking for Kennelly, and the following dialogue unfolds:

[...] 'Why are you looking for him?'  
I asked. 'Because the bastard makes me dumb  
with anger at times,' said Ace, 'and I'd like  
to give him a bloody good piece o' me mind.  
I'm in the right mood for that. It's time to strike  
a blow.' 'Why bother?' I said, 'sure he's only a fat  
bollocks at the best o'times.  
[...]

Don't work yourself up.

21 There is a persistent sense of *Shakespeare in Love* being a kind of culmination of the long tradition of filmic engagements with 'Shakespeare.' See, for example, Douglas Brode, *Shakespeare in the Movies: From the Silent Era to Shakespeare in Love* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), as well as Kenneth S. Rothwell, "How the Twentieth Century Saw the Shakespeare Film: 'Is It Shakespeare?'" *Literature/Film Quarterly* 29.1 (2001): 82-95; Jane E. Kingley-Smith, "Shakespearean Authorship in Popular British Cinema," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 30.1 (2002): 158-65; and Kenneth Womack/Todd F. Davis, "Reading (and Writing) the Ethics of Authorship: *Shakespeare in Love* as Post-modern Metanarrative," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 32.1 (2004): 153-62.

22 Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead, 1998). On the differences between *Shakespeare in Love* and Bloom's bardolatric volume which was "published, not coincidentally, just before the opening of the film," cf. Klett 2001 27n14.

A major poet like you  
should have nothing to do  
with a venal wretch like Kennelly.  
It's better to calm down and go your way.'

Between Burke and Goldsmith, Ace  
stood, statue-like, all passion, honour and grace.  
'Yes,' he said, 'yes, how right you are.  
A true poet must follow his own star  
though it lure him  
into the damned heart of eternity.  
I think I'll walk out to Sandymount strand  
and stroll by the buttock-loosening sea.  
Yes. To ease my soul, that's what I'll do.'

He started to move, halted, turned.

'By the way,' he asked, 'who are you?'

'Me?' I replied. 'Nobody. I'm just passing through.'<sup>23</sup>

23 Brendan Kennelly, *Poetry My Arse: A Poem* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1995). Quoted from Brendan Kennelly, *Get This / Kapier das: Selected Poems / Ausgewählte Gedichte*, ed. Dörte Elias, Gerold Sedlmayr; trans. Dörte Elias (Passau: Karl Stutz, 2004) 122-27.