

## Chapter 1

# The Publishing Trade in Shakespeare's Time

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While his stage is littered with books and papers, writings and volumes, Shakespeare's plays pay little attention to the technologies which reproduced them for dissemination among a reading public. One of the playwright's few explicit references to the printing press and its associated industries occurs in *2 Henry VI*. Confronting Lord Saye, the rebel Jack Cade complains: "Thou hast most traitorously corrupted the youth of the realm in erecting a grammar school; and whereas before our forefathers had no other books but the score and the tally, thou hast caused printing to be used, and contrary to the King his crown, and dignity, thou hast built a paper-mill" (4.7.29–34).<sup>1</sup> The action of the play takes place during the 1450s, the very decade in which Gutenberg constructed the first hand press, and, crucially, the movable type which made his invention workable: an invention which did not reach English shores until 1475. The first English paper mill was not constructed until 1494, and it took the best part of two centuries to establish a healthy domestic industry for the production of printing or writing paper. The play's rampant anachronism suggests the extent to which Shakespeare's concerns are tied to the conditions of print publication in Elizabethan, rather than Henrician, England. That period is also the focus of this chapter, and the following account will touch on the issues of patronage, literacy, nationalism, and the widespread distribution of print which lurk beneath the rebel Cade's violent judicial rhetoric.

If Shakespeare mentions print only seldom, he mentions publishers even less. A rare exception can be found in *The Rape of Lucrece*, when

the poet, lamenting Collatine's description of Lucrece's charms, demands "Or why is Collatine the publisher / Of that rich jewel he should keep unknown, / From thievish ears because it is his own?" (33–5). Collatine's fateful publication is oral and occasional, a far cry from the busy world of the hand press and the bookstall. Bearing in mind the multiple resonances of "publication" for an early modern audience, this chapter will close with a brief exploration of the overlapping modes of publication – print, manuscript, speech, and image – that characterized the era of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Our own association of publishing and print did not emerge until the later eighteenth century as the boundaries between public and private became more clearly demarcated, and as manuscript reproduction became increasingly associated with the intimate and personal, reinforcing the association of print with the public sphere. The word which Shakespeare would have used to describe a member of the book trades, and which his erstwhile colleagues, Heminge and Condell, employ in the First Folio address "To the great Variety of Readers," is "stationer," a flexible category which includes printers, booksellers, bookbinders, and various other associated or overlapping trades. Although for the sake of clarity, I will occasionally use the term "publisher" in this chapter, it should always be remembered that no member of the early print trade would have used the term to describe himself or herself.

A London Guild of Stationers, whose members were scribes, illuminators, and sellers of manuscript books and writing materials, can be traced back to at least 1403, well before the advent of print. In 1557, with the printing press firmly established in London, the bookmen of the city banded together to form the Stationers' Company, and were granted a royal charter of incorporation by Mary I. In 1559, members received the right to wear their own distinctive livery. The Stationers' Company was no new invention, but the institutional recognition of a network of trades and an artisanal heritage with a long history. Nor did the creation of the Company herald any immediate revolution in the trade. Instead it marked the drive to order and regularize a number of well-established practices, many of which predated the advent of print.

By the time that Shakespeare was writing, some three decades after the incorporation of the Stationers' Company, the London publishing trade was well established. In the year of his birth, 1564, the *English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC)* lists 93 printed titles, 86 of which were published in London. By 1592, the year in which Shakespeare was famously attacked as "an upstart crow" in *Greenes Groats-worth of wit*,

the figures were 294 and 252 respectively. For 1601, two years after the construction of the Globe theater on London's Bankside, the *ESTC* lists 258 titles, with 222 printed in London, figures that rise to 487 and 416 in 1616, the year of Shakespeare's death, and 566 and 474 in 1623, the year that saw the publication of the First Folio (see Barnard and Bell 2002). At the same time, however, the number of printing houses in existence was strictly controlled, and numbers remained consistent at 22 or 23 until the 1640s, when restrictions established by a Star Chamber decree of 1586 were relaxed.

One reason for the mismatch between a static productive capacity and the growing volume of texts was suggested by D. F. McKenzie, who argued that earlier titles are less likely to survive, with a rapid increase in the rate of loss the further back in time we go. This thesis is supported by the number of entries in the *Stationers' Company Registers* that record titles of which no other trace now remains. Some of these may never have been published, but others almost certainly entered print and have been subsequently lost or destroyed through use. The problem is particularly acute for popular and ephemeral texts such as ballads and almanacs. Margery Trundle, for example, a well-known ballad publisher of the late 1620s, is listed as the publisher of 13 items in the *ESTC*, yet the *Stationers' Company Registers* indicate that at the time of her death she was the owner of at least 30 texts. Similarly, Elizabeth Toye is now associated with only three imprints, yet in 1557, along with John Wallye, she entered 31 ballads in the *Register*. A further explanation for the growing numbers of books apparently issuing from the same number of presses may be that printing houses in the early part of our period were working at a lower proportion of their productive capacity than they were in later years. In 1582, the queen's printer, Christopher Barker, complained that the 22 London printing houses in existence, home to 53 presses, were substantially too many for the market to bear, and that "8. or 10. at the most would suffice for all England, yea and Scotland too" (Arber 1967: I, 144).

Barker's emphasis on the national context may well reflect the Stationers' Company's resentful relationship with the newly established university-based presses of Oxford and Cambridge. With the exception of these two printing houses the Stationers' Company exercised a largely effective monopoly on printing in England. During the first half of the sixteenth century, presses were established in St Albans, Oxford, Cambridge, Tavistock, Abingdon, Ipswich, Worcester, Canterbury, and York, but all of these provincial presses had ceased to

operate by 1557. Scotland, governed by its own laws, gained its first press in Edinburgh in 1508, and printing houses in St Andrews and Glasgow followed in the second half of the sixteenth century. The first press in Dublin began to operate in 1551. In England, however, with the exception of Norwich, where Anthony de Solemne operated a printing press from 1568 to 1580, catering to the needs of the Flemish, Dutch, and Walloon “strangers” who made up approximately 40 percent of the city’s population, there were no presses outside London until, despite the bitter opposition of the Stationers’ Company, a printing house was established in Cambridge in 1583, with another following in Oxford two years later.

Despite strict control of the number of printers and presses allowed in England (most printers were licensed to operate no more than one or two presses), there were always some printers who were prepared to defy the law and risk searches, whether by the pursuivants of the crown, or by officials of the Stationers’ Company. Discovery of a secret press could lead to fines, imprisonment, and the defacing of the press, rendering useless some very expensive equipment. Printers who took these risks may have done so in search of profit, as in the complex case of John Wolfe. In a flurry of printing activity, Wolfe appears to have infringed over half the printing privileges owned by members of the Company, or by courtiers who had received a patent from the queen allowing them the sole right to print certain classes of books. When questioned by officials of the Stationers’ Company in 1582, Wolfe justified his repeated infractions with the defiant answer that he printed “Because I will live,” and a search of his premises in the summer of 1583 revealed five presses, two “in a secret Vau[l]t” (Arber 1967: II, 780; I, 248). Wolfe was, eventually, reconciled with the Company and translated from the Fishmongers’ to the Stationers’ Company on July 1, 1583. Although this did not entirely prevent his vigorous attempts on other people’s patents, Wolfe became an active member of the Company, and, ironically, was particularly active in discovering and prosecuting illicit printers.

Those whom Wolfe pursued might, like him, be looking to increase the often precarious income of a stationer, or they might be driven by religious or political commitment. Perhaps most often, their motives were a combination of principle and profit. What is now probably the best-known of the secret presses of early modern England is that on which Robert Waldegrave printed the Martin Marprelate tracts, moving around the country from the house of one patron to another, at East Molesey, Fawsley, and Coventry. One of his tracts, *Oh Read*

Over *D. John Bridges, for it is a Worthy Worke* (1588), attacks John Wolfe for his relentless pursuit of Waldegrave, describing him as "alias Machivill . . . [a] most tormenting executioner" (sig. D1r). Having been pursued relentlessly by both the crown and the Stationers' Company, Waldegrave ended his association with the Marprelate tracts, moving to Edinburgh in 1590 and quickly gaining the position of king's printer to James VI. In this role, he enjoyed a long and successful career, though his royal elevation did not prevent new skirmishes with the English authorities, who disliked his continuing Puritan sympathies, and with the Stationers' Company, who saw his Scottish editions of various texts as attempts at piracy. What the overlapping careers of John Wolfe and Robert Waldegrave remind us is that the line between licit and illicit printing was a fine one in early modern England. Printers could move with relative ease from the right to the wrong side of the law, and back again.

The 97 founding members of the Stationers' Company, those who set many of its regulations in place, were, for the most part, printer-publishers, following in the tradition established by William Caxton, the first English printer. Even at the moment of the Company's incorporation, however, the organization of the trade was shifting into new and distinct forms, as the physical labor of printing became separated from the business of finding new texts and financing their production. Slowly the balance of power in the trade moved from those who manufactured books to those who paid for them and held the rights to the copy that was reproduced. Where, in the first part of our period, some power might still lie with the printers, who had an intimate relationship with the means and mechanisms of production, by the end, it had largely shifted to those stationers who controlled what we would now describe as the intellectual property of the trade, as well as the flow of investment capital. As early as 1582, the queen's printer Christopher Barker, who was, it must be noted, a somewhat biased observer, complained that booksellers were able to drive such fierce bargains that the printer made little if any profit on most editions. The precise relationship between printer and publisher can perhaps be best described by examining a typical imprint of the period.

The first quarto of *The Tragedie of King Richard the second* (1597) declares its place of publication as "LONDON / Printed by Valentine Simmes for Androw Wise, and / are to be sold at his shop in Paules church yard at / the signe of the Angel. / 1597." In this instance, Valentine Simmes was the printer: the person who owned the

manufacturing equipment and who, along with his workmen, produced the book. The master printer oversaw a complex set of processes, from the casting off of the text (working out how many words would fit in each line, and how many lines on a page) to the setting of type in formes, the operation of the presses, the checking and correction of the text during production, and the drying and storage of completed sheets in the correct order. He or she (a small but substantial number of early modern stationers were women, almost all widows who had inherited the business from their husbands) often had to keep careful track of work on several presses on which a number of different books, along with smaller ephemeral texts and pieces of jobbing work, were being printed concurrently. To print only one book at a time would occupy too high a proportion of a printer's valuable resources. Larger texts were not infrequently split between several printing houses, spreading the financial burden between a number of workers and presses. This was also a useful technique for the production of illicit or potentially subversive texts, allowing printers and pressmen to deny any knowledge of the nature of a book of which they had printed only one small part.

As was the case for *Richard II*, the majority of printers manufactured books on behalf of another agent, in this case Andrew Wise. It is Wise whom we would now describe as the publisher, responsible for purchasing sufficient paper stocks, paying the printer, compositor (who set the type for printing), and corrector, and also paying for presswork. Pressmen, known by their colleagues, who would sometimes taunt them with wisps of hay or straw, as "horses" because of the sheer physical labor involved in their work, were usually paid a piece rate. The publisher was usually also the primary retail agent, and the imprint gives full details of where the text can be bought. To purchase copies of *Richard II*, the customer or client would visit the many bookshops of St Paul's Churchyard, looking for Wise's shop sign, painted with an angel. This detailed information as to location was primarily for the benefit of others in the trade rather than the casual customer. As Peter Blayney points out, although the public could purchase books at these sites, the imprints effectively identify the wholesale retailers of the text: the distributors from whom other members of the trade could purchase or exchange books to sell on to their own customers (1997: 390).

Illicit, subversive, or satirical books often exploited the conventions of the imprint, both disguising their origins and declaring their comic or irreverent intent. The first Marprelate tract, *Oh Read Over*, also known

as *The epistle to the terrible priests* (1588), which Robert Waldegrave printed at East Molesey, declared itself to be “printed oversea, in Europe, within two furlongs of a bouncing priest, at the cost and charges of M Marprelate, gentleman.” As Patrick Collinson points out, Waldegrave’s mocking imprint at once described and denied the geography of early modern London. “Europe” referred to the house from which the tract was published, and which stood a little over two furlongs away from Hampton Court Palace where John Whitgift, Martin’s “bouncing priest,” met with his fellow divines to determine church policy (Collinson 1967: 391).

While printing itself was carefully regulated, even if, as we have seen, that regulation was not always effective, involvement in the early modern publishing trade was not restricted to members of the Stationers’ Company. Noble or aristocratic patrons might sponsor the publication of a text they considered particularly important. In 1592, for example, the antiquary Sir Edward Stradling financed the publication of 1,250 copies of Siôn Dafydd Rhys’s *Cambrobrytannicae . . . linguae institutiones*, a Welsh grammar in Latin, declaring “I do give fifty of them ready bound to my friend Mr. Doctor Davys, the author of them; and my will is, that the rest of them shall be given and bestowed from time to time by my cousin, Sir John Stradling, upon such gentlemen and others as he shall think fit” (Williams 1948: 195–6). Many authors took on the role of publisher themselves: paying for the production and distribution of their own texts. This is another convention invoked in the false imprint to *The epistle to the terrible priests*, which declares itself to be published at Marprelate’s own “cost and charges,” at the same time mocking those members of the community of print who insisted on their social elevation, describing themselves as “gentlemen” on title-pages and in prefaces and dedications. Some authors sold on their printed texts, most often the case if they ran a related business, teaching handwriting or languages, for example, or selling instruments, whether musical or nautical. Some gained financial or political rewards from dedications to a patron. Yet others distributed their books free of charge. This was especially the case for several church ministers who paid handsomely to spread the word of God to their parishioners in printed as well as spoken form.

It was not only authors, however, who might look to the intercession of a patron for financial aid, for political support, or to secure some favor, privilege, or position. Stationers too sometimes developed clear links with a noble or aristocratic patron, who might, in turn, exercise some say in the nature and complexion of the texts emerging

from his or her client's presses. England's first printer, William Caxton, identified himself in colophons and dedications as the servant of Margaret, duchess of Burgundy. In the early 1580s, John Charlewood, like John Wolfe a persistent printer of other men's privileged copies, identified himself as servant to the Catholic Philip Howard, earl of Arundel. Where Charlewood's business prospered, Arundel, who, with his wife, also sponsored manuscript publication from their house in Spitalfields, died in the Tower in October 1595, amid rumors that he had been poisoned by his cook. Within the confines of the established church, John Day, one of the finer printers of the period, enjoyed the protection of Archbishop Parker. In 1566, Day commissioned a special set of Anglo-Saxon typefaces in order to print Aelfric's *Testimonie of antiquitie*, which was edited by the archbishop. The text was both religiously and politically significant, establishing a series of ancient precedents to oppose to the practices of the Catholic church. In recognition of his efforts, Day was granted a patent giving him sole right to print Alexander Nowell's popular *Catechism* in 1570, a patent which was later extended to include all of Nowell's writings. Christopher Barker, as well as enjoying royal support, marked his texts with a printer's device that featured the tiger's head from his patron Sir Francis Walsingham's crest, and, in 1576, established a second shop in Paternoster Row (an area heavily associated with religious printing) marked by the sign of the tiger's head.

However he or she was financed, or whoever took on the role, the first step for the early modern publisher was to secure the rights to the relevant copy, often through a one-off payment to the author. We have little evidence, however, to tell us how much authors might expect to receive for their handiwork. Those authors who name a price usually do so in the context of a complaint, humorous or otherwise. John Stephens, in the "Epistle Popular" to his 1613 play, *Cynthia's Revenge*, derides the manner in which "our pie-bald Naturalists, depend upon poore wages, gape after the drunken harvest of forty shillings, and shame the worthy benefactors of Hellicon" (sig. A2v), while in the anonymous play *The Second Part of the Return from Parnassus* (c. 1601), the printer John Danter is seen explaining to Ingenioso (a figure for Thomas Nashe) that "good fayth, M. Ingenioso, I lost by your last booke; and you know there is many a one that pays me largely for the printing of their inventions, but for all this you shall have 40 shillings and an odde pottle of wine" (Leishman 1949: 247–8). This evidence, however, is inconclusive. Not only does Danter eventually up his price, declaring he will have Ingenioso's "Chronicle



of Cambridge Cuckolds" "whatsoever it cost," it also seems that "40 shillings" was a colloquial term to describe any insignificant sum of money. In court records from the period, defendants or plaintiffs who describe themselves as being "worth little or nothing" will often estimate their wealth at 40 shillings. Somewhat paradoxically, the repeated invocation of this precise sum in complaints at stingy patrons, swipes at booksellers, and declarations of poverty serves to undermine its reliability as a historical source.

Publishers could, however, provide both economic and intellectual support beyond a simple one-off payment. While few English stationers had the skills, the humanist learning, or the literate acquaintance of the continental master printers, their shops and offices were nonetheless depositories of learning, and often better stocked than an author's private library. In the course of a 1616 dispute over his proprietary rights in the Protestant divine William Fulke's *Confutation of the Rhemish Testament* (first edition 1589), the stationer John Bill recounted the history of the text's production:

Doctor Fulke being not sufficiently stored with bookes to performe it cam[e] to London to master Bishop a stationer where he and two of his men with their horses were mayntained by Bishop for 3. quarters of a yeares space and of Bishop he had such bookes for ye making of the treatise as he wanted. When it was finished Bishop in consideracon of his former charge and for ye diett Doctor Fulkes fri[e]nds likewise had of Bishop when they cam[e] to visit Doctor Fulke as also for 40<sup>li</sup> which Bishop gaue to Doctor Fulke and for diuers bookes giuen him he had ye printing of yat copie to him and his Assignes. and this appears by witnesses as also by ye Registry of ye Stationers hall where this was entred before ye master and wardens of ye Stationers at a Court the[n] holden as all copies which are bought by Stationers are. (Arber 1967: III, 39)

If John Bill, one of Bishop's three assigns, is to be believed, his colleague's support for Fulke's mammoth project included a payment of £40, the loan and gift of several books, paying for the maintenance of Fulke, two servants, and their horses, and entertaining the divine's friends. Little wonder that Bishop and Bill felt they had a clear right to print and profit from subsequent editions of the *Confutation*.

What is certain is that modern notions of copyright and intellectual property are largely an invention of the eighteenth century, and do little to illuminate our understanding of early modern authorship or the Renaissance publishing trades. Just as the playwright of Shakespeare's

time gave up all rights in his play once he had received payment from the theater owner, so the scribbling author handed over his or her proprietary rights along with the manuscript copy. And if somebody else, whether friend or thief, handed over that copy instead, the rights of the authors were similarly overridden; their only real redress was to attempt to persuade another publisher to issue a different, or corrected, edition. As George Wither, another consistent complainer, grumbled in *The Schollers Purgatory* (1624): “by the lawes of their Corporation, they [the Stationers’ Company] can and do setle vpon the particular members thereof p[er]petuall interest in such Bookes as are Registered by them at their Hall . . . notwithstanding their first Coppies were purloyned from the true owner, or imprinted without his leaue” (sigs. B6v–7r). In practice, the situation was more complex than this. Some authors (the most-trumpeted instance being Ben Jonson) took a detailed and ongoing interest in the production of their works, while others (traditionally Shakespeare, though this orthodoxy is now being challenged) were little concerned with the fate of their texts after they were consigned to the press, or, earlier, to the acting companies.

Church authorities, however, took a continuing interest, officially at least, in printed texts. Just as, from 1581, all plays had to be approved by the Master of the Revels before they could be acted, all printed texts, following the Star Chamber decree of 1586, had to be licensed by the Church Court of High Commission. In practice, this responsibility was often devolved to a panel of junior clerics. In the later part of our period, Sir George Buc, who was Master of the Revels from 1610 until he was declared insane in 1621, was, from 1607 onwards, responsible for licensing plays for the press as well as for the stage. This move away from the Church Courts reflects a gradual shift from religious to secular oversight of the press as we move from the Elizabethan to the Jacobean period. The requirement for ecclesiastical or other authority should not, however, be used to paint a picture of blanket censorship and rigorous control over artistic, religious, or political expression. Many texts appeared without an ecclesiastical license, and few of them were pursued or prosecuted unless they seemed to threaten disorder in the state. Elizabethan and Jacobean England was a political culture well aware of its own vulnerabilities, and of the potent power of the written and circulating word. It was not, however, as many earlier commentators held, a culture of systematic and retributive censorship and oppression. As John Barnard reminds us:

The continuing attempts throughout the period to control the output of the London presses and the circulation of manuscripts and of unlicensed, pirated or subversive books or pamphlets, whether through licensing, the Stationers' Company, the Star Chamber, Parliamentary acts or, after the Restoration, through Sir Roger L'Estrange's appointment as Surveyor of the Press, were only intermittently successful. (Barnard 2002: 3)

The Company's own regulations and procedures were, as a rule, pragmatic rather than ideological. The charter granted by Mary I in 1557 declared that no new book should be published without the Company's consent, which could be obtained for a small fee, assuming no objections were raised. The Company might protect itself and its members by refusing to allow a book to be licensed until it had been reviewed by the ecclesiastical authorities. More often, however, the reason for refusing a license would be that prior rights to the text were held by another member of the Stationers' Company. The Company's overriding concern was to make sure that stationers' rights to copy were not infringed. This was particularly important given that the early modern concept of copy was much more elastic than our modern notion of copyright. Once a title was registered, a stationer held rights not just to the text in question but to other books on the same topic and to different versions of the same story.

Once they had received the appropriate external authority and a license from the Stationers' Company, printers and booksellers sometimes chose to record their proprietary rights in the Company *Registers*. As Peter Blayney has decisively shown, however, registration was not a legal requirement, nor was it insisted upon by the Company. It was simply the most convincing mechanism by which the stationer could establish ownership of a text or title, and the clearest safeguard against other publishers attempting to profit from the same, or a similar, work (Blayney 1997: 400–4). As John Bill put it in his letter to the Bishop of London, "And this entry in ye hall booke is the commun and strongest assurance yat Stationers haue, for all their copies, which is the greatest part of their Estates" (Arber 1967: III, 39). In 1622, six years after Shakespeare's death, some moves were made to regularize this *ad hoc* procedure and insist on registration, but these were rarely enforced, and it was not until 1637 that the Star Chamber issued a decree stating that every book should "be first lawfully licenced and authorized . . . and shall be also first entred into the Registers Booke of the Company of Stationers" (Arber 1967: IV, 530).

To return to our brief case study, on August 29, 1597, Andrew Wise both licensed and registered his copy of *Richard II*, paying the

standard sum of 6d. for a license, and an additional 4d. to the clerk for registration. Wise may have been optimistically hoping for a bestseller which others would be quick to print if he did not establish his rights. Certainly his was an unusually successful venture in play-book publication, with one edition in 1597, and two new printings following in 1598. As a rule, however, printed drama was a gamble for any publisher. The consistent bestsellers of early modern England were religious texts, school books, and ephemeral products, such as almanacs and ballads. When we bear in mind the fact that, with the exception of items of jobbing printing such as advertisements, anonymous proclamations, and mortality bills, over half of all texts printed during our period were religious in content, and that even those that were not explicitly theological often invoked the presence of an all-powerful God, we are reminded of the historical and textual contexts in which the works of Shakespeare must be read: a context that is too easily ignored if the plays are read only alongside other dramatic texts, or selections of lyric verse.

With an eye on the financial risks of overproduction, Peter Blayney has estimated that a first edition of a playbook might consist of somewhere between 800 and 1,200 copies (1997: 405–10). A larger edition would, of course, make a greater profit if it sold out reasonably quickly, but it also risked much greater losses if, or often when, it did not. If the first edition did sell out, establishing a demand for the book, the publisher might risk a larger second edition, particularly as the overheads for copy and licensing were already covered. The trade as a whole was heavily dependent on reprints, and guaranteed sellers were as popular with stationers as they were with readers. Books which were protected by a privilege or patent, and were guaranteed to be in demand either because they were consistently popular (ABCs and almanacs), or because they were to be purchased for churches by order of the crown (certain Bibles, the *Book of Common Prayer*, and Fulke's *Rhemish Testament* in later editions), might run to as many as 2,000 copies. Where books were not printed for profit, but for personal distribution to friends or patrons, numbers might be much lower. In 1577 John Dee had 100 copies of his *General and Rare Memorials* printed by John Day. The first edition of King James's *Basilicon Doron*, printed by Robert Waldegrave in Edinburgh in 1598, ran to only seven copies, two of which still survive.

In the early modern period, as now, stationers had an array of tactics to persuade the customer to part with his or her money. These included furnishing the book with an intriguing title, fronting it with

a dramatic woodcut illustration that might have little connection with the subsequent contents, and including a dedication to a noble patron, a practice that seems to have been as often a marketing ploy as a genuine quest for aristocratic favor. Publishers and authors gathered together commendatory verses from friends, acquaintances, and hack writers, and prefaced even unaltered editions with the words "newly corrected." Even the standard trope of unauthorized publication might work to draw in a potential reader, offering the frisson of access to a forbidden text. Stationers paid for the printing of additional copies of title-pages and nailed them to posts or walls.

Not all authors enjoyed this public exposure, at least according to Ben Jonson, who in a verse address to his bookseller begged that his book should not be

offer'd, as it made sute to be bought;  
Nor have my title-leave on posts, or walls,  
Or in cleft-sticks, advanced to make calls  
For termers, or some clerck-like serving-man,  
Who scarce can spell th'hard names: whose Knight lesse can.  
("To my bookseller," ll. 6–10)

Here Jonson is repeating the common lament that members of the nobility were more interested in hunting and hawking than in reading, and it is their servants he expects to eye his overexposed texts, even if they are liable to stumble over the most difficult words. But what might Jonson's clerk or trainee lawyer expect to pay for his book, assuming he could both find and read it? In 1598, the Court of Assistants of the Stationers' Company issued an order limiting the price of new books. Books without illustrations should be sold for no more than a penny for two sheets if they were set in pica or English type, and no more than one penny for one-and-a-half sheets if they were set in the smaller brevier or long primer fonts. Peter Blayney has, however, pointed out that these were wholesale prices, which could sometimes be reduced further thanks to trade discounts, and that the ordinary customer could expect to pay approximately 50 percent more before binding (1997: 410). Most play quartos cost around 6d., while the actor Ned Alleyn paid 5d. for a copy of Shakespeare's sonnets in June 1609. A contemporary diarist and courtier, Richard Stonley, paid 12d. for a copy of *Venus and Adonis* 16 years earlier in 1593 (Schoenbaum 1977: 175–6). These prices can be placed in some kind of context if it is remembered that £5 or £6 (somewhere between 200

and 240 quarto playbooks) was a typical annual income for many in the period.

Readers could buy their books from a broad range of outlets. The center of the London, and indeed the national, book trade was St Paul's Churchyard, described by Thomas Nashe as "the peruser of euerie mans works and Exchange of all Authors" (1592, sig. D3r). Other important sites for the early book trade included the area around Westminster Hall, the main concourse leading from Cheapside to Cornhill, and the notorious areas of Little Britain and Smithfield, associated with the production and sale of ballads and other forms of cheap print. Booksellers ranged from those possessing substantial commercial properties, at least two stories high, to street peddlers and mercuries (hawkers or distributors of pamphlets) like the "Termers and Cuntrie chapmen" described by Thomas Middleton in his preface to *The Familie of Loue* (1608). Unlike printing, bookselling was never confined to London. Itinerant peddlers would purchase stocks from the shops that lined London Bridge or Smithfield Market, close to the major routes out of London. Provincial booksellers could also replenish their stock at a series of major book fairs in cities and towns including Oxford, Salisbury, Bristol, Ely, Nottingham, Coventry, and Sturbridge, near Cambridge.

Substantial cities usually boasted at least one bookshop, while other traders both in cities and in smaller towns might carry a few books alongside their usual stock-in-trade. The City of York had its own Company of Stationers and Booksellers, whose regulations were confirmed by the Corporation in 1554. Booksellers in provincial towns sometimes developed strong trading links with London printers, and commissioned texts themselves, stepping into the role of publisher. The London printer Anne Griffin, for example, was at the center of a purchasing and distribution network that covered much of the south of England. Griffin printed one edition of Niccolo Balbani's *The Italian Convert* (1635) with variant issues sold by "H. Hammond of Salisbury," "W. Browne of Dorchester," "J. Cartwrit of Coventry," "E. Dight of Exeter," "P. Whaly of Northampton," "M. Sparke," and "A. More," presumably in London. Another text manufactured by Griffin, *A true and certaine relation of a strange-birth, which was borne at Stone-house in the Parish of Plinmouth* (1635), was produced in two variant issues, one sold by her long-term associate Anne Boler in London and another intended for the local audience catered for by "W. Russell in Plinmouth."

The book trade also crossed national boundaries. Within what is now the United Kingdom, stationers traveled between Edinburgh,

Glasgow, and London to sell or purchase new books. Strong overseas links were maintained with Jesuit centers, such as St Omer and Douai in the Spanish Netherlands, from whence illicit Catholic texts were smuggled into the country. Records suggest that the vast majority of Catholic texts circulating in this period were printed abroad. Individual purchasers and stationers also traveled to some of the major European book fairs, particularly that at Frankfurt, to maintain their libraries or purchase the latest works of humanist learning. The demand for Latin texts was largely met through a tight network of stationers, many of European origin, who maintained strong trading links with the continent, importing large numbers of small-format classics, and smaller numbers of learned texts in folio. Foreign involvement in the Latin trade, always viewed with some suspicion by a protectionist domestic industry, diminished gradually during the period. The crown made a number of attempts to safeguard or create English jobs, particularly through repeated prohibitions on the importation of bound books, as well as limitations on the importation of paper.

Though English presses could not, as a rule, produce the quality or volume of Latin works that their customers demanded, English binders could still stitch and cover them. Despite this, many members of the nobility preferred to take or send their books back to the continent to have them bound by famous craftsmen, although the earl of Leicester showed his support for the domestic trade by employing only English binders to produce his simple brown calf bindings, stamped with his crest, the bear and ragged staff. Until the later part of the period, however, the paper in even a native book had usually to come from the continent, particularly the paper mills of Holland, France, and Italy. Paying attention to the industries of papermaking and bookbinding, and their connection to the politics and economics of publication, brings us finally to call into question the title of this chapter. While it is certainly possible to speak of the publishing trade in Shakespeare's time, it is perhaps more accurate to speak of numerous related publishing trades.

At the beginning of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, in a moment of potent dramatic irony, the aging monarch declares to his assembled court: "We have this hour a constant will to publish / Our daughters' several dowers, that future strife / May be prevented now" (1.1.42-4). As any reader will be quick to realize, Lear, like the narrator of *Lucrece*, is using the term "publish" not in its most usual modern sense, "to place before or offer to the public, now *spec.* by the medium of a book, journal or the like," but in its older sense, "to announce in a formal or

official manner; to pronounce (a judicial sentence), to promulgate (a law or edict); to proclaim" (*OED*, defs. 4.b; 2.a). In early modern England, publication did not necessarily imply the reproduction of printed copies. It could mean the act of writing, as when a courtier "published" ("to tell or noise abroad" [*OED*, 1.1.a]) the most recent court gossip in a private letter to his or her friend in the country. It could also, as in *Lear*, mean the act of speaking with the intention of making information, whether news, legal and political proclamations, or scandal, more widely known. Lear's avowed intention is to make public his divisions of the kingdoms; the act of speaking *is* here the act of publishing.

In the world of ballad singers, or itinerant salesmen, like Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale*, the realms of print and oral publication overlapped, as they did too in taverns, coffee houses, and religious meetings of various kinds. Printed texts were made public and disseminated through speech and song, as well as private reading. And, as much recent scholarship has made increasingly clear, it was not just print and orality that overlapped to make up the complex web of publication and communication in early modern England. The manuscript reproduction of texts was still a vital industry. Provincial towns in particular must have been heavily reliant on the work of scribes to circulate information in multiple copies. Manuscript production continued to thrive well into the late seventeenth century, and texts could be published either through their multiple reproduction in scriptoria or through the gradual dissemination of a copied and recopied text: the primary mode, for example, by which John Donne's poems were published prior to his death. Surviving commonplace books of the period illustrate the diversity of verses, satires, jokes, and recipes that were published to an ever-expanding audience as they passed from hand to hand.

Manuscript circulation did not always imply a restricted readership. Where many authors blamed their unwilling decision to publish on the prior circulation of an illegitimate or faulty copy, Thomas Nashe, in an unusual twist on the standard dedicatory trope of a pirated text, informed his dedicatee, Lady Elizabeth Carey, that

the vrgent importunitie of a kinde friend of mine (to whom I was sundrie waies beholding) wrested a Coppie from me. That Coppie progressed from one scriueners shop to another, & at length grew so common, that it was readie to bee hung out for one of their signes, like a paire of indentures. (1594: Aijv-r)



Manuscript publication, according to Nashe, has been as effective and pervasive as print. Ben Jonson's 1626 comedy, *The Staple of Newes*, reminds us of the flourishing early modern trade in scribal separates and newsletters, offering an intriguing picture of the dynamics of an early news office, publishing social and political gossip for a wide range of readers.

Many religious books, particularly Catholic texts, circulated widely in manuscript. Even texts which were printed, such as the anonymous *Leicester's Commonwealth* (1584) and Father Robert Persons's *A Conference About the Next Succession* (1594), were often hand copied by would-be owners who did not wish either to purchase or to possess illegal printed texts. At the same time, the act of copying was understood to construct an intimate relationship with the divinely inspired word, and to demonstrate a devout attention to the religious text. In these instances, manuscript and print were not exclusive choices. Texts could, and often did, circulate in both media, as well as through the spoken word.

The very notion of a publishing trade threatens to restrict our understanding of the multiplicity of mechanisms through which texts could be made public, or sent abroad, in early modern England. It also serves to disguise the sheer variety of the industries and processes which came together to produce the early modern book. As D. F. McKenzie reminds us: "Almost all texts of any consequence are the product of the concurrent inter-action of ideologies and institutions, of writers, publishers, printers, binders, wholesalers, travellers, retailers, as well as of the material sources (and their makers and suppliers) of type, paper, cord, and all the appurtenances of a printing house" (1992: 128). The publishing trades of early modern England relied upon such diverse industries as papermaking, metalwork, engraving and woodcut production, the fabric and clothing industries (the eventual source of the rags which made the paper), leatherwork, carpentry, and transport services. An attention to the material detail of the book does not only illuminate our understanding of literary production and ownership, of how and where books were bought and sold, and of the mechanics of printing. It also brings into focus, if just for a moment, the many and varied human transactions and relationships that underlie the act of publication, and the numerous labors that come together to make possible the existence of any circulating text.

**Note**

- 1 All references to the works of Shakespeare are from Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, and David Scott Kastan (eds.), *The Arden Shakespeare: Complete Works* (London: Thomson Learning, 2001).