

William Shakespeare was and is one of the most influential playwrights in the history of Western culture. His poetry and plays, all written in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, are the focus of many English classes, drama studies, and cultural studies courses across the world due to their enduring impact on our current language use, appreciation for art and theater, and cultural folklore. His works, even hundreds of years later, still contain resounding themes about love, mortality, betrayal, and beauty, and as a result, they are elevated highly and studied at length. This love for Shakespeare has become an enduring phenomenon, and followers of the bard are involved in a constant search for works to contribute to their favorite English playwright--but there are some poems whose Shakespearean authorship has been contested. One poem that has been the subject of much debate is "A Lover's Complaint," a 331-line poem which was originally published under Shakespeare's name by Thomas Thorpe and printed by George Eld. In recent years, the work's shoddy publication history and markedly poor syntax have caused scholars to debate the authentic authorship of the work--but, despite these aspects which deny its authentic authorship, I have concluded, both through historical research and close reading, that "A Lover's Complaint" is indeed an authentic work of Shakespeare. I believe that if "A Lover's Complaint" is recognized as a part of the larger Shakespearean canon, this conclusion not only would alter how the Shakespeare-studying world would view the *Sonnets* as a complete text, but would also create space for the voice of a woman in a male-coded work of literature--and that, if it is not recognized, then that voice is eradicated within Shakespeare's poetry.

The first questionable aspect of "A Lover's Complaint" is its publication history. The work was first included in *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, published in 1609 by Thomas Thorpe and printed by George Eld. This quarto edition of Shakespeare's work included his original 154 sonnets followed by "A Lover's Complaint." At the beginning of the 17th century and near the end of the 16th century, concluding a collection of poems with a confessional, longer poem was common practice, and such a format was also practiced by Shakespeare's contemporaries, namely Samuel Daniel in 1592 and Thomas Lodge in 1593 (Craik). The main argument which opposes Shakespeare's authentic authorship of "A Lover's Complaint," then, does not concern format or contemporary practices, but rather the character of the publisher, Thomas Thorpe. Thorpe was not himself a printer, but a publisher, and as such, he primarily worked to compile works from authors and then submit them to the Stationers' Register, a royally chartered publishing company that was responsible for the regulation of publishing and bookmaking in London. Because the Stationers' Register could give publishing rights to any party that submitted their manuscript first, Thorpe could publish a work without the express permission of the author. Scholars who do not believe

that “A Lover’s Complaint” is an authentic work of Shakespeare point to this possibility as the case with the publication of *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*--if Shakespeare did not expressly claim the work for himself, they argue, then it is possible that Thorpe was using the bard’s name to sell his copies. This allegation is not a new one for Thorpe, who also published the long-disputed “A Funeral Elegy,” another work which was at the time attributed to a ‘W.S.’ but in the modern academic tradition has been treated as a controversial work and sparked debate similar to that surrounding “A Lover’s Complaint” (Caruana).

The problem of ‘unauthorized’ text has been a significant one in the legacy of Shakespeare, whose publication history has been rife with ambiguity--and yet, in the context of “A Lover’s Complaint,” this claim has been refuted by Katherine Duncan-Jones, who claims that “Thorpe was a publisher of some deserved status and prestige, handling works by close associates of Shakespeare, and producing, in many cases, highly authoritative texts” (154-155). According to Duncan-Jones, even if the speculation about Shakespeare’s ‘unauthorized’ text could be proven for *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, it would not be significant, as publishers at this time often printed the work of their authors without express permission, not as an act of piracy, but as a common practice. Supporters of “A Lover’s Complaint” look not only at the publication history of the work, but also at the historical context of the publication, taking into account the common practices of the time, which included middlemen such as Thorpe and compositions which included a collection of short sonnets or poems concluded with one long conclusion. Duncan-Jones’ position in favor of “A Lover’s Complaint” as an authentic work of Shakespeare is supported by Mac D.P. Jackson. Jackson looks to both scholars such as Duncan-Jones as well as to the existing work done within the burgeoning field of the digital humanities by statisticians like Ward E.Y. Elliot and Robert J. Valenza to explain the strangeness of “A Lover’s Complaint.” After looking at the many computer tests and scholarly inquiries done over the years, Jackson concludes that, while “A Lover’s Complaint” is by no means and example of beautiful, transcendent Shakespeare, its close resemblance to his other lesser works, such as *Cymbeline* and *All’s Well That Ends Well*, as well as the evidence submitted concerning its written creation and publication, places it clearly in the Shakespearean canon as an authentic work of the bard.

If Duncan-Jones and Jackson are correct, then the publication history of “A Lover’s Complaint” is not uniquely suspect within its context. To this point, the next step to take in support of the validity of “A Lover’s Complaint” as an authentic work of Shakespeare will be to compare the themes of the work with those of its original companion piece, which has been authenticated as Shakespearean--namely, his sonnets.

Shakespeare's sonnets are a collection of 154 short poems that each tell part of a romantic story and are primarily organized into two distinct sequences--the Fair Youth sonnets (1-126) and the Dark Lady sonnets (127-154). The first sequence depicts the male poet in attempting to communicate his love for another man, and are full of admiring, yearning expressions of love, while the Dark Lady sequence is more concerned with the more risqué themes of sexual desire and submission. In these final 28 sonnets, the poet writes about his female lover in a misogynistic style which paints her as a temptress, and characterizes 'love' as an all-powerful, vindictive force which takes over the poet's reason; he describes his lust as "murd'rous, bloody, full of blame, / Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust; / Enjoyed no sooner but despised straight" (Shakespeare 129, 3-5). To the poet, the Dark Lady is a sickness, the "female evil" (Shakespeare 144, 5) who is sent to ruin him--clearly, the woman is barely tolerable, and is a curse on the male poet's life. Resulting from the poet's dislike for his female lover but admiration for his male lover is an imbalance in the narrative voice, as the reader observes only the sins and failures of womankind and hears nothing of the failures of male lovers. But, if "A Lover's Complaint" is included in the collection (as it was originally when published by Thorpe), then the poisonous defamation of a lover is then carried out in a woman's voice, and, after 154 sonnets, the readers finally get to hear about the troubles endured by a woman. The maiden of "A Lover's Complaint" feels that her seduction was "an art of craft" (297), designed to trick her into giving up her chastity; she writes of her lover, "His poison'd me, and mine did him restore" (303), thus recognizing that there is a distinct power imbalance between her and her lover, as he abandons her, and she is left with his poison, and further, the guilt and shame of having fallen into his trap. The female speaker is here denying her lover's innocence, and thus creates a balance between the *Sonnets* and "A Lover's Complaint," in which neither gender is blameless, but all are victim to the powerful sway of love.

The historical review of "A Lover's Complaint" as well as the thematic similarities found between "A Lover's Complaint" and Shakespeare's collection of sonnets are both solid evidence in support of the authenticity of "A Lover's Complaint," but there is one missing, essential piece to the puzzle of qualifying "A Lover's Complaint" as an authentic work of Shakespeare: the prosodic and metaphorical comparison between "A Lover's Complaint" and Shakespeare's "The Rape of Lucrece." "The Rape of Lucrece," unlike "A Lover's Complaint," is not an original story by Shakespeare, but is instead a retelling of a myth already documented in Livy's *History of Rome*, as well as Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women*, in which the wife of an aristocrat, Lucretia (Anglicized Lucrece), is raped by Tarquin, the son of an Etruscan king, and then commits suicide. Her husband and father seek revenge for Tarquin's crime and Lucretia's

death, and thus they bring an end to the monarchy which had ruled Rome. Shakespeare's retelling of this myth details the horrifying bartering between Tarquin and Lucrece, the rape of Lucrece, her inner turmoil, and finally, her eventual confession before she commits suicide. Both "The Rape of Lucrece" and "A Lover's Complaint" belong to the genre of medieval confession, which is characterized by a male author writing about the guilt and sin of a character while using a woman's voice. One author who supports the authenticity "A Lover's Complaint" through observing it as a medieval confession is Katherine Carik. Under this lens, Craik exposes the ways in which "A Lover's Complaint" is clearly linked to other confessions made by Shakespeare's contemporaries, a genre in which a woman professes her sin. In addition to this genre study, Craik also looks at many of Shakespeare's other works, such as *Hamlet*, "The Rape of Lucrece," and *Othello* for examples of confessions which mirror "A Lover's Complaint," providing further evidence of the thematic similarities between Shakespeare's accredited works and "A Lover's Complaint."

In the aforementioned poems, the women both profess their lack of purity, as the lover in "A Lover's Complaint" was not chaste in her past relationship, and Lucrece in "The Rape of Lucrece" allows herself to be raped by the Etruscan prince Tarquin--but the theme of adultery is not the only similarity between these two works. Additionally, both poems share a common structure, as both written in rhyme royal, with an ABABBCC rhyme scheme, and adhere to iambic pentameter--and yet even more intriguing, they also contain several cases of identical end rhyme:

~ ~ ~ ~ ~
 |And down| I laid| to list| the sad|-tuned **tale**;
 |Ere long| espied| a fic|kle maid| full **pale**,
 [...]
 |A youth|ful suit|--it was| to gain| my **grace**--|
 |Of one| by na|ture's out|wards so| commend'd,
 |That maid|ens' eyes| stuck ov|er all | his **face**:
 |Love lack'd| a dwell|ing, and| made him |her
place;
 ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

~ ~ ~ ~ ~
 |That ev'n| for an|ger makes| the li|ly **pale**,
 |And the| red rose | blush at | her own | disgrace,
 |Shall plead| for me| and tell| my lov|ing **tale**.
 [...]
 ~ ~ ~ ~ ~
 |In the| remorse|less wrin|kles of |his **face**.
 |Her mod|est el|oquence| with sighs| is mixed,
 |Which to| her or|ato|ry adds| more **grace**.
 |She puts| the per|iod| oft'n from| his **place**.
 ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

|With ob|jects man|i|fold:| each sev'ral **stone**,|
|With wit| well bla|zon'd, smiled| or made| some
moan.|

[...]

|And now| she would| the ca|ged cloi|ster **fly**:|

|Reli|gious love| put out| Reli|gion's **eye**:|

[...]

|Of wealth,| of fil|ial fear,| law, kind|red, **fame**!|

|Love's arms| are peace,| 'gainst rule,| 'gainst
sense,| 'gainst **shame**,|

[...]

|Who glazed| with cry|stal gate| the glow|ing

ro|ses

|That flame| through wa|ter which| their hue|

enclo|ses.

("A Lover's Complaint," 4-5, 79-81, 217-218, 250-251, 271-272, 288-289).

|To make| him moan,| but pi|ty not| his **moans**.|

|Stone him| with hard|'ned hearts| harder| than
stones,|

[...]

|Gnats are| unnot|ed where|soe'er| they **fly**,|

|But ea|gles gazed| upon |with ev|ery **eye**.|

[...]

|Which of| them both| should un|derprop| her

Fame.|

|When Vir|tue bragged,| Beauty| would blush| for

shame;

[...]

|This si|lent war| of li|lies and| of **ro|ses**,

|Which Tar|quin viewed| in her| fair face|'s field,|

|In their| pure ranks| his trai|tor eye| **enclo|ses**,|

("The Rape of Lucrece, 478-480, 562-565, 1014-1015, 71-73)

The sheer volume of matching words within these two texts is extraordinary, as it allows readers to focus on the nuts and bolts of poetry, and the practical application and use of specific sounds. These instances of identical end rhyme also support the prosodic similarities between the two works, and the specificity of the word choice in addition to the coupling of such rhymes suggest that both works were written by the same author. Authors are often attributed with a unique 'voice' which is made up of the words or phrases that can be found commonly within their work, and while "The Rape of Lucrece" may be the more beautiful of the two works, the undeniable similarities in the word choices within both "A

Lover's Complaint" and "The Rape of Lucrece" create a solid foundation upon which further similarities can be observed.

The prosodic similarities between "A Lover's Complaint" and "The Rape of Lucrece" lend significantly to the case for "A Lover's Complaint"'s authentication--but, not only are two poems structurally and prosodically similar, they also contain metaphors that closely resemble each other. One of these similarities in metaphor can be found in "A Lover's Complaint" and "The Rape of Lucrece," when the poet refers to the warmth of a crying cheek, and the cooling quality of tears:

'O father, what a hell of witchcraft lies
In the small orb of one particular **tear!**
But with the inundation of the **eyes**
What rocky heart to water will not wear?
What breast so cold that is not warmed
here?
O cleft effect! cold **modesty**, **hot** wrath,
Both fire from hence and chill extirpate
hath.
("A Lover's Complaint," 290-296)

Cooling his **hot** face with chastest **tears**
That ever **modest eyes** with sorrow shed
[...]
The spots whereof could weeping purify,
Her tears should drop on them
perpetually.
("The Rape of Lucrece," 682-683)

The metaphor here displayed brings forth the idea that while sorrowful tears may release some of the heat of passion or shame, it will not erase the deeds that have caused this disruption. In both, it is the cooling power of regret that eases the heat of passion, and from this theme, even more similar metaphors abound.

Later in both passages, we find even more similarities in metaphor, as both "A Lover's Complaint" and "The Rape of Lucrece" describe the impossibility of denying that desire which lives in the body, and denying Reason:

Counsel may stop awhile what will not
stay;
For when we rage, advice is often seen
By blunting us to make our wits more
keen.
'Nor gives it satisfaction to our blood,
That we must curb it upon others' proof;
To be forbod the sweets that seem so
good,
For **fear** of harms that preach in our

'Shameful it is: ay, if the fact be known,
Hateful it is: there is no hate in loving.
I'll beg her love. But she is not her own.
The worst is but denial and reproving;
My will is strong, past reason's weak
removing.
Who fears a sentence or an old man's saw
Shall by a painted cloth be kept in awe."
[...]
Respect and **Reason**, wait on wrinkled
Age.
My heart shall never countermand mine
eye.
Sad pause and deep regard beseems the

behoof.
O appetite, from judgment stand aloof!
The one a palate hath that needs will taste,
Though **Reason** weep, and cry, 'It is thy
last.'
(“A Lover’s Complaint,” 161-172)

sage;
My part is youth, and beats these from the
stage.
Desire my pilot is, beauty my prize;
Then who **fears** sinking where such
treasure lies?
(“The Rape of Lucrece,” 239-245,
275-281)

In both of these passages, Reason is personified as a force which must bend to the will of love. The specific choice to personify the idea of Reason further confirms the similarities between the two passages, as the reasonable mind’s bending to the will of the lustful body is a theme which is attributed both to Tarquin in “The Rape of Lucrece” and the maiden in “A Lover’s Complaint.” This personification of Reason also subverts the more common personification of Love, which can be found more often in Shakespeare’s other works, such as in “Venus and Adonis.”

The final comparison to be made between “A Lover’s Complaint” and “The Rape of Lucrece” comes from their lines which depict the distinction between bodily sin and the sins of the mind:

All my offences that abroad you see
Are errors of the **blood**, none of the **mind**;
Love made them not: with acture they
may be,
Where neither party is nor true nor kind:
They sought their shame that so their
shame did find;
And so much less of shame in me
remains,
By how much of me their reproach
contains.
(“A Lover’s Complaint” 184-191)

Though my gross **blood** be stained with
this abuse,
Immaculate and spotless is my **mind**:
That was not forced, that never was
inclined
To accessory yieldings, but still pure
Doth in her poisoned closet yet endure.
(“The Rape of Lucrece” 1655-1659)

Interestingly, while both poems differentiate between the sins of the mind and the sins of the body, in “A Lover’s Complaint,” this plea is created by the male lover to prove himself worthy of the female lover, and is thus intended to erase guilt and blame, but the same logic is employed in “The Rape of Lucrece” to justify Lucrece’s coming suicide, as she sees that a bodily sin still requires purging, even if a sin of the mind (consensual sin) has not been committed. The separation between blood (body) and mind (reason) is used in both poems, but the metaphor

is used by the author to elicit two differing actions from the characters--the male lover of "A Lover's Complaint" seems to observe his own bodily sin as inconsequential as long as his mind is pure, while Lucrece of "The Rape of Lucrece," though she be pure of mind, finds her bodily sin to be so drastic as to justify her suicide. It is also of note that Lucrece's vindication that her sin needs to be purged is framed as noble and just, while the male lover's dismissal of his own adultery is framed by the female lover as a cause for mistrust and concern. The use of the same metaphor--the sin of the blood in contrast to the sin of the mind--further cements the idea that "The Rape of Lucrece," a noble tragedy, and "A Lover's Complaint," a comedy, use the same ideas, words, and metaphors in order to elicit varied responses from their audiences--and that they were likely penned by the same hand.

After reviewing this historical, thematic, and prosodic, and metaphorical evidence, I am prepared to contend that "A Lover's Complaint" is a true work of Shakespeare. Its strong history, thematic resonance with the *Sonnets*, and its prosodic and metaphorical similarities to "The Rape of Lucrece" all testify in favor of the work's authentic status, and thus I believe that "A Lover's Complaint" deserves to take its rightful place in the larger Shakespearian canon. Placing "A Lover's Complaint" in the larger Shakespearian canon is significant for advanced students of the bard as well as novice readers of Shakespeare's poetry, as when "A Lover's Complaint" is included in his collection, it widens the lens of Shakespeare's work to include not just the perspective of a man in love, but a woman as well. Although it is merely Shakespeare's impression of a woman, the compassion and sympathy which is conveyed towards the ill fate of the maiden in "A Lover's Complaint" represents a different side of Shakespeare's writing, in which a woman is not a temptress, or a witch, or a villain only, but a person whose regret and pain are treated with a serious voice and considered with solemnity. This provides both a diversification of perspectives within Shakespeare's work and allows for a counter to the male-centered perspective which Shakespeare so often occupies, thereby opening his work to interpretation and gender comparison in ways which have not been practiced in the study of his works in the past.

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