EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES

Darren Freebury-Jones, *Reading Robert Greene: Recovering Shakespeare's Rival* (New York: Routledge, 2022). 217 pp. ISBN 978-1-032-15409-1.

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Reading Robert Greene: Recovering Shakespeare's Rival is an essential new study dedicated to Robert Greene's dramatic works. In a rigorous quantitative assessment, Darren Freebury-Jones focuses on plays often attributed to Greene and uses stylistic analysis to reassess the merit of these attributions. His determination is based on a multitude of factors. To name but a few, he examines the pauses indicated by punctuation and is attentive to feminine endings and n-grams ('n' equals the number of matching words in a phrase) across all early modern plays in his corpora. Ultimately, he claims that *Locrine* (1591) was solely authored by Greene (p. 177) and that, like *A Looking Glass for London* (1589), *Selimus* (1591) was co-authored with Thomas Lodge. Finally, he attempts to exclude works long associated with Greene though not attributed to him definitively: *George a Greene (1591), John of Bordeaux* (1591), and *A Knack to Know a Knave* (1592).

Although *Reading Robert Greene* is invaluable for presenting cutting-edge quantitative-analysis-based research, its value also lies in its re-creation of the early modern theatre scene in London and the country. Freebury-Jones captures its collaborative, creative energy and offers endearing portrayals of its unique characters, especially Greene. He provides many new facts and compelling, nuanced readings of Greene's idioms, themes, dramatic structures, stage directions, and props. One notable example is Freebury-Jones's observation regarding the politeness of Greene's stage direction. As he asserts, 'Greene's stage directions run contrary to the general view that his relationship with theatre companies was combative' (p. 41). In one of his earliest plays, *Alphonsus, King of Aragon*, Freebury-Jones points out that Greene asks politely, '*if you can conveniently, let a chair*

come down from the top of the stage' (p. 42). 'Such affable directions,' Freebury-Jones claims, 'need not be taken as evidence of Greene merely attempting to ingratiate himself with the players at the beginning of his career, for similar instances occur in later plays' (p. 42). He points to 'the Fiddler who is permitted to sing "*any old toy*" (4.2 SD) in *Orlando Furioso*' and to a stage direction in *James IV* where "'*certain*" huntsmen […] enter the stage "*if you please, singing*"' (p. 42). Providing a plethora of evidence for the centrality of Greene's plays and his influence on the early modern stage, Freebury-Jones also cites Greene's contemporaries, like Nashe, to suggest that Greene was very much valued in this era as a playwright: 'Greene was his "crafts master" at "plotting Plaies"' (p. 51). Such first-hand recognition of Greene's talent by his contemporaries has often been ignored for counternarratives that suggest Greene was antitheatrical and an enemy to Shakespeare.

The subtitle of *Reading Robert Greene*, 'Recovering Shakespeare's Rival,' alludes to *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit* and the often-asserted assumption of a rivalry between Shakespeare and Greene. Scholars suggest that Greene repudiated the theatre and Shakespeare, among other playwrights, in *Greene's Groatsworth*. In this infamous pamphlet, Shakespeare is accused of being an 'upstart crow' or, as Freebury-Jones argues, an actor usurping the domain of playwrights (p. 3). Some scholars, especially John Jowett, think the lines have been misattributed to Greene. They claim the pamphlet was primarily written by Henry Chettle (p. 3). Though not weighing in definitively on this attribution, Freebury-Jones offers an optimistic view of Greene's relationship with the theatre and 'recovers' Greene not as Shakespeare's rival but as an influential figure in Shakespeare's world.

After situating Greene in the context of the early modern theatre in the first few chapters of the book, Freebury-Jones uses statistical analysis to ascertain Greene's style in the four sole-authored plays long established as belonging to Greene — *Alphonsus*, *Orlando Furioso*, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, and *James IV*. By isolating Greene's dramatic style, he provides evidence for his claims regarding the authorship of plays only marginally attributed to Greene, as mentioned above. *Locrine*, *Selimus*, *George a Greene*, *A Knack to Know A Knave*, and *John of Bordeaux* fall into this category. In so doing, he distinguishes Greene's style from his potential collaborators. Ultimately, his findings do not support the claim that Greene was the author of *George a Greene*, *John of Bordeaux*, or *A Knack to Know a Knave*.

Freebury-Jones asserts that Greene's substantial influence on other playwrights of this era might help explain the many plays misattributed to Greene. For example, the occasional echoing of Greene's language from *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* in *John of Bordeaux*, a kind of sequel to *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, indicates its author's familiarity with *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* rather than Greene's authorship. Because *John of Bordeaux* is not part of an electronic corpus — Freebury-Jones's copy is provided by the highly esteemed early modern historian Helen Good — he could not definitively determine its authorship. But his preliminary analysis indicates that Chettle cannot be ruled out as an editor or even a co-author (p. 100). Throughout this study, Freebury-Jones leaves little doubt that Greene's plays were of central importance while offering new and provocative information through his attributions and exclusions. Adding new plays to the list of plays thought to be by Greene in the Queen's Men's repertoire, for example, is reason alone to accept his assertion that Greene's plays were significant to Elizabethan theatre.

While Freebury-Jones's attribution of plays to Greene seems undeniable, excluding Greene definitively from authorship even for plays within Freebury-Jones's corpus proves more challenging. This is especially true of *A Knack to Know a Knave*. Paul Esmond Bennett's rigorous, though unpublished, analysis suggests all that remains of *A Knack to Know a Knave* are bad quarto editions of memorial reconstruction.[1] Bennett presents significant evidence of strong verbal parallels between *A Knack to Know a Knave* and *Gwydonius, or The Card of Fancy,* among other prose works. Many of these borrowings are also listed in the Malone edition of *A Knack to Know A Knave* by Richard Proudfoot.

Bennet's work on *A Knack to Know a Knave* claims that early modern editing and memorial reconstruction can make stylistic analysis difficult in a couple of ways: there are multiple authors' styles in a play, and a particular author is deliberately imitating another — often poorly. If Greene took passages from his own and others' prose works across genres to create the original *Knack to Know a Knave,* and if the original play were poorly remembered by an actor or editor reconstructing or even amending the work, Greene might be the original author of *A Knack to Know a Knave* and stylistic analysis of his n-grams would likely not detect it.

[1] Paul Esmond Bennett, 'A Critical Edition of *A Knack to Know A Knave*' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1952), *Dissertations Available from ProQuest*, AAI0004896 <https://repository.upenn.edu/dissertations/AAI0004896/>

Recycling his own work and borrowing from others was a common practice for Greene, thematically and stylistically. *A Knack to Know a Knave,* as Freebury-Jones points out, shares important elements of the romantic plot with other dramatic works by Greene, like *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* and *James IV;* it echoes the deceiving 'proxy-wooing' and Greene's 'stock-in-trade' man carried off by a devil (p.117). Memorial reconstructions also often contain added or missing content from the original work, and this is true of both *A Knack to Know a Knave* and *John of Bordeaux*, the other play with echoes of Greene's prose that shares romantic plots and social satire with Greene's dramatic work, but which Freebury-Jones's stylistic analysis does not include in Greene's oeuvre. Finally, the alteration of linguistic patterns and multiple styles is complicated by the wholesale incorporation of prose into drama. Not only would a memorial reconstruction not yield accurate n-grams, but the unintegrated use of prose would also not produce accurate results regarding meter or rhyme.

The authorship of *A Knack to Know a Knave* presents a unique enigma when considered alongside Freebury-Jones's analysis of *John of Bordeaux* and *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit*. In *Groatsworth,* Greene's Puritan conversion contradicts the anti-Puritan main plot borrowed from *A Knack to Know a Knave,* which is also used to depict the details of Greene's life. These conflicting themes and dramatic parallels raise questions of influence and authorship. It is noteworthy that *Groatsworth,* which provides these specific details, wasn't published until September 1592, months after the earliest performance of *A Knack to Know a Knave* in June of the same year. Bennett's research confirms that the play appeared for the first time in *Henslowe's Diary,* performed at the Rose.[2]

A Knack to Know a Knave features a narrative that involves Puritan mockery in the form of a usurious father who gives unethical advice to his duplicitous coneycatching son. This advice is given instead of inheritance, and it is very similar to the unethical advice Roberto is given in place of inheritance in *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit* — the 'groatsworth of wit' in the title — making Roberto (whom the author announces in the narrative that he is) very like the coneycatching son in *A Knack to Know a Knave*. In *The Repentance of Robert Greene,* published within months of *Groatsworth,* which is like *Groatsworth* in that it purports to be Greene's dying repentance, the dying author claims to have an entirely different upbringing, and he claims to be so dastardly that critics have thought the pamphlet was a rewrite of *The Repentance of a Coneycatcher,* which Greene had promised to write.

[2] Bennett, p. 57.

Rather impossibly, Greene describes his own last moments in this work, suggesting its fictional quality.

Given the history of Roberto in *Groatsworth* and the history of the coneycatcher in *A Knack to Know a Knave, Groatsworth* might have been the promised *The Repentance of a Cony Catcher* with editorial amendments. Only one of two people would know, Greene or Chettle, and Chettle, in his own *Kind-Heart's Dream*, mentions having the opportunity to transcribe Greene's works left unfinished and illegible at the publishers when Greene died; he also might have had the motive to attack a Shakespeare in charge of paying the playwrights. *Henslowe's Diary* portrays a Chettle continuously in debt to the players. As Roslyn Knutson suggests, there is evidence that Chettle was scolded and ridiculed for his prodigality.[3] Though Chettle denied the attack on the 'upstart crow' could Chettle be the rival that Freebury-Jones ultimately recovers? Hopefully, he can isolate these problems, create a greater corpus, perform a cross-genre analysis, and arrive at conclusions that unravel the remaining mysteries, but as Freebury-Jones's exciting new book indicates, the fun is also in the journey.

In *Reading Robert Greene: Recovering Shakespeare's Rival,* Freebury-Jones has written a captivating study of Greene's dramatic work. One of the most exciting aspects of this study, and there are many, is the questions it raises and the engagements it promises. Anticipating such engagements and disagreements with his finding — as he suggests, this type of research is often subject to 'intense and sometimes hostile scrutiny' (p. 26) — he provides readers with his corpus, a detailed account of his methodology, and acknowledges its limitation. This detailed explanation will undoubtedly appeal to scholars unfamiliar with statistical analysis in authorship attribution, but, most importantly, it will provide those skeptical of his findings with the transparency necessary to engage in independent analysis. Ultimately, *Reading Robert Greene: Recovering Shakespeare's Rival* is informative, well researched, and provocative. What self-respecting Greene scholar would not be excited about the conversations to come?

[3] Roslyn L. Knutson, 'The Commercial Significance of the Payments for Playtexts in "Henslowe's Diary", 1597-1603', *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, 5 (1991), pp. 117-63 (p. 133), *JSTOR*. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24322093 [Accessed 20 June 2023].