

Give and Take

Reflections on Collaborative Authorship in Early Modern English Literature

Abstract

The study of literary collaboration has traditionally been driven by the impulse to attribute authorship, resulting in the dismantling of texts by parcelling out fragments to individual contributors. By contrast, we hope to gain insights into the co-creative process by identifying and analysing reflections on multiple authorship in early modern English texts.

We consider four such reflections which are linked by the idea of *giving* (and, by implication, *taking*). In all four instances, *giving* serves as a metaphor which conveys the transcendence of limits and limitations in collaborative aesthetic creation. The prologue to William Shakespeare and John Fletcher's *The Two Noble Kinsmen* emphasizes the play's indebtedness to Chaucer by transcending a gap in time and establishing diachronic co-authorship. George Herbert's poem *A Wreath* reflects on the possibility of collaborating with God in order to produce a better artefact. Here, the notion of giving expresses the reciprocal and cyclical quality of co-creation which can redress individual defects. Example three, the emblem titled *Mutuum auxilium* from Geoffrey Whitney's *A Choice of Emblemes*, construes mutual giving as a duty which derives from the diversity of human faculties, while the intermedial character of the emblem itself invites an application of the moral to artistic production. Lastly, we consider how the epilogues to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* present the gift of applause and the crucially co-creative role of the audience in the realisation of a play in performance.

Keywords

Co-creativity, Collaborative Authorship, Early Modern English Literature, Giving and Taking

1. Introduction

When it comes to previous research on collaborative authorship, the focus is often on authorship attribution¹ and, accordingly, on taking texts apart, e.g. by means of stylom-

* Translated by the authors of this chapter. Quotations for which no other translation is cited have also been translated by the authors.

1 One of the most prominent recent examples is the New Oxford Shakespeare edition with its volume "Authorship Companion" (Egan/Taylor 2017). Egan 2017 gives an overview of "A History of Shakespearean Authorship Attribution," whereas further chapters focus on general methodology and individual cases of collaborative authorship. See also Juola 2008 on methods of authorship attribution more generally.

etry.² By contrast, our focus will be on the collaboration itself.³ As part of a joint project,⁴ our agenda is twofold: firstly, we wish to identify reflections on collaborative authorship in texts. This is more easily said than done, since explicit reflections of this kind are rare, at least within the realm of early modern English literature. We will therefore include implicit ones as well: self-referential and self-reflexive statements are examined for any information about collaboration; moreover, representations of collaboration in literary texts (by one or several authors) are probed for reflections on the production of literature. This analysis leads up to the second part of our agenda: to find out what those reflections tell us about the nature, functions, gains and losses, etc. of collaborative writing. Since we expressly include indirect and metaphorical reflections, we expect to arrive at notions of co-production in various forms and guises: the poetics of co-authorship will be configured as an aesthetics of co-creativity.⁵

This is an ambitious enterprise, and for the purposes of this paper we will have to focus on specific cases in point. We want to show different kinds of co-creativity and different kinds of reflecting on co-creativity but relate them to each other by a common denominator. Since collaborative authorship as a form of co-creativity is rarely described in abstract terms, we have chosen a telling metaphor that functions as a figure of aesthetic reflection: *giving* (and, by implication, *taking*)⁶ is, so to speak, a metaphor collaboration lives by, as it serves to show how various forms of collaboration may differ but also relate to one another.⁷

- 2 See, e.g., Craig 2009; Craig 2009/2010; Egan et al. 2016. For a critical approach, see Bauer/Zirker 2018.
- 3 Hirschfeld 2001; Hirschfeld 2004; Hirschfeld 2015; and Masten 1997a; Masten 1997b are some of the few examples of scholars who have also explored the gains and the (aesthetic) function of collaboration, albeit with a specific focus on theatrical collaboration.
- 4 The work on this chapter was carried out as part of project C5: “The Aesthetics of Co-Creativity in Early Modern English Literature” of the Collaborative Research Center 1391 *Different Aesthetics*, funded by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG), project no. 405662736. See <https://uni-tuebingen.de/en/research/core-research/collaborative-research-centers/crc-different-aesthetics/research-projects/project-area-c-concepts/c5-bauer-zirker/> (last accessed: 18 November 2024).
- 5 See, e.g., Bauer/Zirker 2019.
- 6 Conceptualizations of collaboration as forms of giving may thus also be distinguished from other kinds of social transaction, e.g. Greenblatt’s ‘circulation of social energy’; see Greenblatt 1988.
- 7 The analysis of giving as a metaphorical expression of literary collaboration is evocative of Marcel Mauss’ anthropological interpretation of gift exchange, famously laid out in his “Essai sur le don: forme et raison de l’échange dans les sociétés archaïques” (Mauss 1923/1924). Gift exchange, to Mauss, is “a relational scheme” which posits “an obligation to give, to receive and to return a present” (Papilloud 2018, p. 664). Within this scheme, not only is it near impossible to refuse a gift outright and evade its attendant social compulsions, a return gift must also fulfil the conditions set by the original gift (Papilloud 2018, p. 666). Whereas Mauss focuses on giving and accepting (gifts) as a means of establishing and regulating social interaction, we focus on giving and taking

As we hope to show, literary co-production means something different in each of our four examples: *giving* represents four different processes and states of co-creativity, and in each case something is created because the very thing that is being talked about actually happens before the eyes and ears of the reader or audience. The examples of co-creativity selected are synchronous and asynchronous; they rely on dialogue and mutuality as well as mutual necessity, and, last but not least, involve audience collaboration.

2. Diachronic Co-Authorship: William Shakespeare and John Fletcher, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*

The Two Noble Kinsmen, first performed in 1613 and the last completed play by William Shakespeare, is an example of diachronic co-authorship. The play was jointly written by Shakespeare and John Fletcher, but the prologue foregrounds that co-creativity extends beyond their synchronous collaboration:

New plays and maidenheads are near akin:
 Much followed both, for both much money gi'en,
 If they stand sound and well. And a good play,
 Whose modest scenes blush on his marriage day
 And shake to lose his honour, is like her 5
 That after holy tie and first night's stir
 Yet still is modesty, and still retains
 More of the maid, to sight, than husband's pains.
 We pray our play may be so, for I am sure
 It has a noble breeder and a pure, 10
 A learned, and a poet never went
 More famous yet 'twixt Po and silver Trent.
Chaucer, of all admired, the story gives;
There, constant to eternity, it lives.
 If we let fall the nobleness of this, 15
 And the first sound this child hear be a hiss,
 How will it shake the bones of that good man

in co-creative processes and consider social interaction as a means of jointly producing an artefact. The co-creative “giving” primarily happens for what is jointly contributed, whereas the exchange of gifts primarily happens for a social purpose. But see below note 24: We nevertheless regard co-creative giving as a process that is inseparable from the social realms in which it takes place and from the actors it involves. Ingrid Hentschel 2019, p. 10, has suggested the applicability of Mauss’ theory to the study of theatre, reasoning that it stresses intersubjectivity and co-operation, and – like dramatic performance itself – mediates between aesthetic freedom, social co-operation, and obligation; cf. Hentschel 2019, p. 11.

And make him cry from underground 'O, fan
 From me the witless chaff of such a writer
 That blasts my bays and my famed works makes lighter 20
 Than Robin Hood!' This is the fear we bring;
 For, to say truth, it were an endless thing
 And too ambitious, to aspire to him,
 Weak as we are, and, almost breathless, swim
 In this deep water. Do but you hold out 25
 Your helping hands, and we shall tack about
 And something do to save us. You shall hear
 Scenes, though below his art, may yet appear
 Worth two hours' travel. To his bones sweet sleep;
 Content to you. If this play do not keep 30
 A little dull time from us, we perceive
 Our losses fall so thick we must needs leave.

*Flourish. [Exit.]*⁸

“Chaucer the story gives” (l. 13) entails two concepts of asynchronous collaboration with the source text and its author. This ambiguity becomes perceptible once we look at the prosody of the line: If the stress falls on “gives” – Chaucer the story *gives* – this means that he gives the story away, delivers it, but something happens to it that is independent of him as an author: it will most likely be changed (by the company) with no further diachronic interaction. If, however, the emphasis is on “story” – Chaucer *the story* gives – the Prologue still stresses Chaucer’s agency (the story, which remains the same, was given by him, not taken from him) but also implies that the play is more than that. The focus now is on Chaucer as a co-author of the play, and the choice of metaphor configures him thus: he gives the story, and the company gives something else – something that may, actually, make Chaucer turn in his grave (ll. 17f.). This emphasis, at the same time, ignores a number of other sources of the story that reach back to classical literature, both of Greece and Rome: Euripides’ *Suppliants*, Seneca’s adaptations of Euripides, and Statius’ *Thebaid*.⁹

While the first reading, with the stress on “gives,” may explain why the prologue has been read as an apology for the play’s “inferiority to Chaucer,”¹⁰ expressive of

8 Shakespeare/Fletcher: *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, Pr. 1–32 (our emphasis: ll. 13f.).

9 See Bauer/Zirker 2021, p. 218; they refer to Potter 2015, p. 50, who notes that, “[t]hough the Prologue gives no indication that Chaucer was indebted to others for his story, the dramatists would certainly have known the *Thebaid*, if only because of John Lydgate’s ‘Siege of Thebes,’ a retelling of Statius, which was first added to Chaucer’s *Works* in Stowe’s edition of 1561 and reprinted by Speght in his 1598 edition (revised in 1602).” For the classical as well as late medieval sources of Chaucer, including Boccaccio’s *Teseida*, see Potter 2015, pp. 45–47.

10 Mowat et al. 2021.

“a fear not only of physical exposure but also of literary desecration,”¹¹ the second reading, with “the story” in focus, foregrounds the company’s role in the marriage scenario presented by the Prologue, which emphasizes that it takes two in a marriage.¹² In this scenario, the story is given away by Chaucer as the bride’s father,¹³ and the “writer” (l. 18) of the play becomes the husband who is afraid that he and the company, who act as one, will dishonour the maid by their text and performance.¹⁴ Accordingly, the Prologue hopes that the play will remain “more of the maid” (l. 8) in spite of this intervention (“first night’s stir,” l. 6).

The establishment of family relations in the prologue can, in a next step, be linked to the title of the play, which focuses on *Two Noble Kinsmen* (rather than the tale of two knights, as in the original *The Knight’s Tale*), with a foregrounding of the story’s as well as the characters’ nobility; the emphasis on family relations may also be linked to the notion of procreation and thus evoke another poetological metaphor of co-authorship. This notion pertains to both the continuation in time of a “story” in which Chaucer is part of the family genealogy and to the imaginative process itself, in the course of which the story is not only continued but also altered.

Within this constellation, Chaucer specializes in story, but the company may emulate and change as well as add to it. This reading indicates the temporality of the different components (story, dialogue, etc.) in the process of composition. The speaker of George Herbert’s *A Wreath* also reflects on the process of composing a poem co-creatively and on getting a figure of great authority involved, even though – in contrast to the different kinds of co-authorship reflected in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* – the poem itself, much to the speaker’s dismay, is not yet the result of the desired collaboration.

11 Potter 2015, p. 67.

12 See Bauer / Zirker 2021, p. 229, note 54, on the marriage ceremony in the *Book of Common Prayer* (1559, p. 158): “Who geveth this woman to be married unto this man?” One may even read this as a joke going beyond the play itself, as Chaucer, the father of the story, gives it to two husbands at the same time, which may be read as an allusion to Fletcher and his co-author Beaumont, who, according to the early biographer John Aubrey, “lived together on the Bankside, not far from the playhouse, both bachelors; lay together [...]; had one wench in the house between them, which they did so admire; the same clothes and cloak, etc, between them”; Aubrey 1982, p. 37.

13 See also the notion that “[c]ollaboration is ‘like marriage’” (Potter 2015, p. 20).

14 In their contribution on “Shakespeare’s Medieval Co-Authors,” Bauer / Zirker 2021, p. 230, note how the “prologue [...] wavers between family relations of inheritance and the individual genius, an ambiguity inherent to the notion of progeny.” When it comes to the notion of “giving the story,” however, family relations and the link between giving and the act of procreation are to be focused on. See also Teramura 2012 for further reflections on co-creativity in the play.

3. Dialogue / Dialogic Interaction: George Herbert, *A Wreath*

Not only does George Herbert's poem reflect on itself, the "poore wreath" (l. 12), but its speaker also imagines the poem he would preferably give to God, namely, a "crown of praise" (l. 12). *Giving* here serves as a figure of aesthetic reflection because the mutual will to *give* paves the way to a co-created poem superior to *A Wreath*. The speaker wishes for a better poem, one which can only exist if God decides to give him "simplicitie" (l. 9) beforehand. The speaker becomes the one who has to be given something before he can give anything worthwhile himself.

A wreathed garland of deserved praise,
 of praise deserved, unto thee I give,
 I give to thee, who knowest all my wayes,
 My crooked winding wayes, wherein I live,
 Wherein I die, not live: for life is straight, 5
 Straight as a line, and ever tends to thee,
 To thee, who art more farre above deceit,
 Then deceit seems above simplicitie.
 Give me simplicitie, that I may live,
 So live and like, that I may know thy wayes, 10
 Know them and practise them: then shall I give
 For this poore wreath, give thee a crown of praise.¹⁵

In the first three lines, the speaker states that he gives God a "wreathed garland of deserved praise," with the wreath being a token of honour, as in the laurel wreath. At the same time, this is a metapoetical reference to the poem itself since Herbert and his contemporaries frequently used the wreath as a metaphor for poetry.¹⁶ Although the metaphorical meaning of *A Wreath* becomes explicit only at the end of the poem, when the speaker refers to "*this poore wreath*" (l. 12; our emphasis), the speaker indicates the metapoetical meaning of the wreath in the first line of the poem: a "garland" may refer to anthologies.¹⁷ The speaker of the poem, thus, reflects on his attempt to demonstrate his respect and praise God through his poem.

In the ensuing cycle of revising and refining his words,¹⁸ the speaker compares his own ways of life to those of God ("thy wayes," l. 10),¹⁹ and realizes in line 7 that God is

15 A Wreath, in: Herbert: The English Poems, p. 645.

16 John Donne's *La Corona*, Andrew Marvell's *The Coronet*, and Henry Vaughan's *The Wreath* are popular examples.

17 See OED: "garland, *n.*" 4.; Brogan / Gutzwiller 2012, p. 52.

18 For instance, when the speaker's "wayes" (l. 3) become his "crooked winding wayes" one line later or when the phrase "life is straight" (l. 5) is specified in line 6: "Straight as a line."

19 The speaker recognizes that he does not really live because life in his "ways" is death compared to true life, "thereby changing the sense of 'live' from the physical or literal to the spiritual"

not to be deceived; he recognizes that he cannot conceal his “crooked winding wayes” (l. 4) before God, even though deception, being what it is, seems to be better than simplicity (l. 8). After having recognized this error, the speaker changes his approach in the last lines of the poem: his next words are no longer a statement but a plea or even a prayer: “Give me simplicitie” (l. 9). The final words of the poem’s last four lines repeat the final words of the first four lines in reversed order: “live” (ll. 4; 9), “wayes” (ll. 3; 10), “give” (ll. 2; 11), and “praise” (ll. 1; 12). The order of *giving* is now reversed as well. This is an iconic representation of the mutuality the speaker desires. Only if God gives him simplicity first can the speaker truly live in God’s ways (ll. 9–11) and then be able to give God more than just “this poore wreath,” namely “a crown of praise” (l. 12). He does not merely ask God for simplicity in the poetic sense,²⁰ but he seeks a kind of “humility,” “artlessness,” and “[a]bsence of deceitfulness”.²¹ Only God can give him what he needs in order to leave behind his own sinful “wayes,” and “know [...] and practise” (l. 11) God’s ways. What he needs is simplicity in the sense of “straightforward[ness]”²² because, as he realizes, the “line” to God is “straight” (ll. 5 f.).

As *A Wreath* is self-reflective, one could claim that the poem itself is in fact the sought-for “crown of praise” because the speaker could not have undergone the process of recognizing his own deceitfulness had God not given him “simplicitie” in the first place.²³ Herbert, however, chose to call the poem *A Wreath* and clearly distinguishes between “this poore wreath” and “a crown of praise” (l. 12, our emphases). Therefore, this poem merely *reflects* on a concept of co-creativity, yet it is not an example of co-authorship. According to the speaker’s understanding of co-creativity, a mutual offering from both agents and a specific temporality in the process of composition, namely that God needs to be the first giver, can lead to a more valuable poem than the one solely created by the speaker of *A Wreath*. The poem reflects on the inferiority of solitary creation and the superiority of collaborative creation, and it endorses mutual interdependency of both collaborators: receiving from God precedes giving praise to God, and, the other way around, giving the speaker “simplicitie” precedes receiving proper praise from him. The aspired poem, the “crown of praise,” can only come into being if both parties are willing to *give*.²⁴

(Kronenfeld 1981, p. 298). Such a spiritual life is, as he realizes in lines 5 f., “straight, / Straight as a line, and ever tends to [God],” which means that it leads to God.

20 See OED: “simplicity, *n.*” 3.

21 OED: “simplicity, *n.*” 4.

22 OED: “simplicity, *n.*” 1.a.

23 Albrecht 2002, p. 130, e.g., suggests that “[d]esigning an imperfect sonnet allows Herbert to create a perfect wreath [...], which has become a purified offering to God.”

24 We see that Herbert, in *A Wreath*, combines the notion of giving as co-creativity with the exchange of gifts as explored by Mauss 1923/1924: the social interaction is desired to produce a poem, which then in turn becomes a gift to foster the social interaction.

4. Mutual Necessity: Geoffrey Whitney, *Choice of Emblemes* 65: *Mutuuum auxilium*

Whereas our first two examples have emphasized the complex roles of authoritative *giving* in a process of literary collaboration (an actual giving from the past and a hoped-for giving in the future), the Whitney emblem, *Mutuuum auxilium*, from his *Choice of Emblemes* (1586) applies the metaphor of *giving* in a somewhat different manner (Fig. 1). It is not obviously an aesthetic reflection, but that makes it all the more interesting for us, who look for such reflections even where they may not appear at first glance. As the motto indicates, the emblem is about *giving help*, and, since *mutuus* means both ‘borrowed’ / ‘lent’ and ‘mutual,’ it is about mutual support.

The first three stanzas of the epigram are as follows:

The blynde, did beare the lame vppon his backe,
 The burthen, did directe the bearors waies:
 With mutuall helpe, they seru'd eche others lacke,
 And euery one, their frendly league did praise:
 The lame lente eies, the blynde did lend his feete, 5
 And so they safe, did passe both feelde, and streete.

Some lande aboundes, yet hathe the same her wante,
 Some yeeldes her lacke, and wants the others store:
 No man so ritche, but is in some thing scante,
 The greate estate, must not dispise the pore: 10
 Hee works, and toyles, and maks his showlders beare,
 The ritche agayne, giues foode, and clothes, to weare.

So without poore, the ritche are like the lame:
 And without ritche, the poore are like the blynde:
 Let ritche lend eies, the poore his legges wil frame, 15
 Thus should yt bee. For so the Lorde assign'd,
 Whoe at the firste, for mutuall frendship sake,
 Not all gaue one, but did this difference make.

The notion of *giving* first appears in the synonym *lending*: “the lame lente eies, the blynde did lend his feet” (l. 5), interpreted as “gives food” (l. 12) and labour in an application of the allegory to the relationship of the rich and the poor. Moreover, *giving* comes up in the reference to God’s creation, who “Not all gave one, but did this difference make” (l. 18). Our gifts are different so that we can give what we have, “for mutual frendship sake” (l. 17). So far, the emblem is a reflection on social interaction. The purpose of difference is not to foster dissent but, perhaps paradoxically, to make friendship pos-

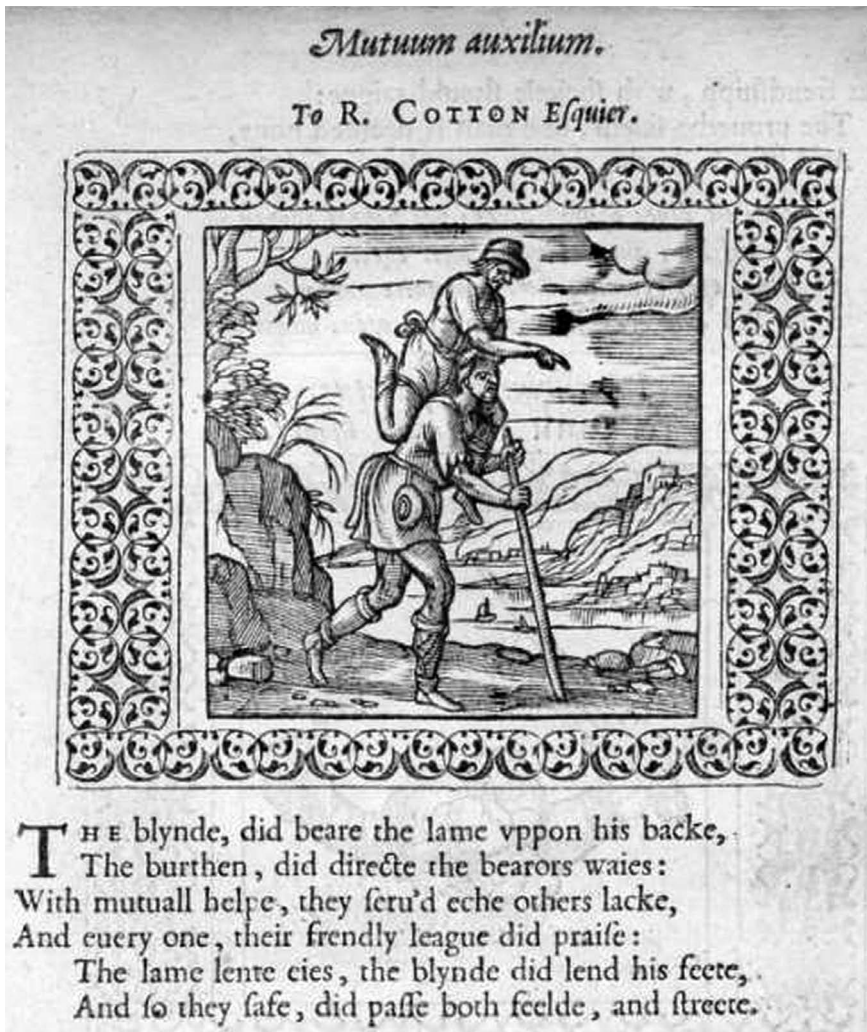


Fig. 1. Geoffrey Whitney: *A Choice of Emblemes and Other Devises* (Leyden: Plantin, 1586) 65–66: *Mutuum auxilium*. Woodcut by Andrea Alciato. Pennsylvania State University, Special Collections Library, shelfmark: PR2388.W4C5 1586.

sible. What seems an individual weakness turns out to be a strength because it makes collaboration necessary.

This is where aesthetic reflection comes in. The way in which the combination of the seeing and the walking faculty (the lame and the blind) is presented invites being applied to artistic production. Gifts must be combined in order to produce a work. One hint towards such a meaning is given by another synonym of *giving*: *framing*. “The poor his legges will frame” (l. 15). This does not mean that he will put his legs into a frame but that he will contribute his legs, his walking capacity, to a joint construction: “shape, form, direct”²⁵ are synonyms of *framing* in this sense. The collaboration of the blind and the lame is a “ioyntworking”²⁶ in which each participant gives what they have.

The *pictura* confirms our reading of the emblem as a reflection on aesthetic collaboration. In the first place, it does so because it is a given (or rather taken) image, not unlike the story given by Chaucer in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*: Like many other images in Whitney’s emblem book, it was taken from the 1577 edition of Andrea Alciato’s *Emblemata*, i.e. the woodcuts available at Plantin’s Leyden workshop.²⁷ Whitney kept the Latin motto but added a dedication and replaced the Latin epigram in Alciato with his own (plus quotations from Horace and Ausonius). Moreover, the *pictura* itself can be interpreted as a reference to aesthetic collaboration since it is reminiscent of images representing the old saw of dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants²⁸ – modern scholars and writers achieving what they do only because of the classics. Thus a 15th-century German encyclopaedic manuscript includes an illustration that shows a big crowned man with a much smaller figure on his shoulders (Fig. 2).

While the context of the drawing is different from Whitney’s (and Alciato’s) emblem, as it is about the acquisition of knowledge and suggests the humility (and comparative smallness) of adepts in relation to their (past) masters, the gesture of the hand pointing ahead is similar. The later achievement is only possible because of the earlier one, but at the same time, the shoulder-bearing allows the perception of what could not be seen otherwise. This configuration suggests that it is not only the younger person who profits from the relationship but also the older one who improves (in this case) his vantage point by shouldering the burden of teaching.

25 OED: “frame, v.” 5.a.

26 Mornay: A Woorke Concerning the Trewnesse of the Christian Religion, p. 64. The context of de Mornay’s treatise, in which the expression is coined, is a different one, as it focuses on the relation between the three persons of the Trinity. Still, the parallel is striking, as de Mornay’s topic is the collaboration of different faculties (in this case, power, wisdom, and goodness) represented by three persons.

27 See Daly and Raspa’s introductory note in their 1988 edition of Whitney: Daly/Raspa 1988, pp. 83–85.

28 For the origin and context of the comparison, see Merton 1993 and Leuker 1997.

Alciato's and Whitney's emblem gives a new twist to the old concept by presenting two persons of equal height. This stresses equality and simultaneity.²⁹ The mutuality that is only implied in the idea and image of dwarfs on the shoulders of giants becomes explicit here. There is no *giving* in the *pictura* but a sense of movement and direction: the leg bent in walking, the outstretched hand, and pointing finger. This is about *faculties* then: we all have our weaknesses, but if we pool our resources, one completely capable person will be the result. The intermedial form also contributes to reading this emblem as a reflection on aesthetic collaboration. The emblem is a combination of two modalities, the one characterized by seeing (the picture) and the other by moving forward (the text to be read from beginning to end, moving to a proverbial conclusion). The pictorial artist gives their eyes, and the poet their feet, with the pictorial metaphor of the feet re-literalizing the poetological one. *Giving* in this case therefore does not mean, as in our first two examples, that something is given to others who are then able to work on its basis, but it means that each gives what they can to the common project as a complementary delivery of what is needed. In this way, the aesthetic aim (cf. the outstretched hand) will be reached, and the community and the work established.

5. Collaboration with the Audience / Listener: Epilogues and Pleas for Applause in *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

A form of community building is also at stake in our final example: dramatic epilogues, which forge a connection between stage and auditorium and utilize this connection to reflect on the co-creation of plays in performance (actual and imaginary). The Shakespearean epilogues we are concerned with – Puck's coda to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Prospero's elegiac conclusion to *The Tempest* – open a direct channel of communication between the world of the play and the world beyond the play, and they solicit the audience's acknowledgement of this connection by means of applause. In turn, the applause provided by spectators as a statement of recognition and goodwill is reciprocated by an – equally important – concession from the stage: performers and playwrights attest to the vital importance of the audience to the entire theatrical endeavour. This deliberately staged reciprocity signals that the work itself can only come into being between producers and audience, i.e. when audience members themselves become co-producers of the play-in-performance.

29 The picture is possibly (also) inspired by representations of Aeneas carrying Anchises on his back when leaving Troy. But while both shoulder-bearing images (the young on the shoulders of the old, the old being carried by the young) stress a diachronic relationship, Whitney's emblem stresses simultaneity.

The generic features of the epilogue (as both performative act and textual artefact) that predispose it most to facilitate mediation and collaboration are (1) its structural and temporal positioning, which allows it to serve as an outro to the theatrical experience and to qualify that experience;³⁰ and (2) its communicative orientation, which suggests the possibility of a dialogue on two communicative levels: between audience and performers, and between audience and fictional characters. This twofold nature of the dialogue is made possible by the way in which epilogue speakers step out of their roles but do not entirely leave them behind. Consequently, they speak from a place that bridges the dividing line between fiction and reality as much as that between actors and audience.³¹ The contributions which writers, actors, and spectators are acknowledged to make to the production of a play traverse culturally potent boundaries.³²

The epilogue concluding Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is exemplary in so far as its speaker, the sly hobgoblin Puck, remains partially in character as he breaks the theatrical illusion with his audience address. Part character, part actor ("shadow[]," l. 414), Puck both makes manifest and bridges the divides between the fiction and its

30 Certainly, as Kent Cartwright 1991 argues, the interplay of audience engagement and detachment can be greatly effective at any point in a play; yet epilogues are sites where the effects of this interaction are inherently heightened. As Douglas Bruster and Robert Weimann 2004, p. 1, assert for the early modern dramatic prologue, the epilogue, too, is text, actor, and performance simultaneously. Like prologues, epilogues are "boundary-breaking entities that negotiate[...] charged thresholds between and among, variously, playwrights, actors, characters, audience members, playworlds, and the world outside the playhouse" (Bruster/Weimann 2004, p. 2). The liminality of the epilogue is heightened, even compared to that of the prologue, by the common practice of having a character familiar to the audience from the preceding play speak the concluding lines from a position halfway between role and performer. In Weimann's terms, the epilogue epitomizes the interplay between 'locus' and 'platea,' i.e., "between the imaginary world-in-the-play ['locus'] and the playing-in-the-world of early modern London ['platea']" (Weimann 2000, p. 12).

31 This process of boundary crossing may have been supported by the penchant of early modern audiences, on the one hand, to believe strongly in the power of literature, for better or worse, to affect human behaviour off the stage and off the page (i.e. the effects of literature 'cross over' into the world); on the other hand, as Jeremy Lopez 2003, p. 33, suggests, spectators were accustomed to the notion of *theatrum mundi* and attuned to "correspondence between 'world' and 'stage'" beyond uni-directional moral causality.

32 Autrey Nell Wiley 1932, p. 257, argues that the popularity of both prologues and epilogues increased from the mid to late 16th century, to reach its apex in Restoration theatre because at this time "the theatre approached verisimilitude, drawing plays away from the audience" while, at the same time, spectators – as "[d]escendants of the Elizabethan audience" – proved unwilling "to be shut out and left to sit as silent watchers." Prologues and epilogues, thus, in the absence of the soliloquy, grew in importance as mediating formats between stage and auditorium. Wiley 1933 also describes a trend for pleading female prologues and epilogues beginning before the closing of the theatres and gaining in popularity in restoration drama.

performance and between stage and auditorium. In his attempt to shape the audience's attitude towards both play and players, the acknowledgement of reciprocity is essential. Puck encourages generosity in the audience by suggesting they use a trick of the imagination on themselves, which simultaneously draws them back into the world of the play (with its enchanted dreams). He suggests they envision the entire performance as a dream, themselves as dreamers:

If we shadows have offended,
 Think but this, and all is mended –
 That you have but slumbered here
 While these visions did appear.
 And this weak and idle theme, 418
 No more yielding but a dream,
 Gentles, do not reprehend.
 If you pardon, we will mend.
 And, as I am an honest Puck,
 If we have unearnèd luck 423
 Now to 'scape the serpent's tongue,
 We will make amends ere long.
 Else the Puck a liar call.
 So good night unto you all.
 Give me your hands if we be friends, 428
 And Robin shall restore amends.³³

It is a testament to the powerfully reciprocal thrust of the epilogue that it tames even shrewd and changeable Puck into compliance with its conventions. Although Puck, in the service of fairy king Oberon, does create new relationships over the course of the play, he is by no means invested in carrying out his master's instructions to the letter, and, on the whole, he takes significantly more pleasure in causing disruption than harmony. Yet, while, by his own confession, he delights in the foolishness of mortals (cf. 3.2.117), he must defer to the good will of the mortals in the audience. Puck not only asks the audience to adopt a generous frame of mind, he also calls on them to make an active contribution: it is only because they *give* their hands³⁴ (cf. l. 428) – in practice, in the form of applause, symbolically, in friendship and support – that the performance

33 Shakespeare: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 5.1.414–429.

34 As Inge Leimberg 1987 has shown, the phrase 'give me your hand' is prone to change meaning according to context across Shakespeare's oeuvre, hinting at destruction as easily as conciliation. It is notable, therefore, that Puck makes his plea in the context of the epilogue: here, the phrase and its variants traditionally serve the cultivation of an amicable relationship between company and audience.

can be satisfactorily concluded.³⁵ Hands applaud, but, beyond that, they symbolize the status of audience members as co-producers.³⁶

The most famous epilogue in Anglophone theatre history also relies on the motif of *hands* to signify audience involvement – both in constituting and dissolving the fiction. Prospero’s speech, closing Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, emphasizes that it is only “the help of your good hands” (l. 6), i.e. the spectators’ goodwill expressed by applause (and more), which can adequately ‘release’ the players from their roles. Prospero grants significant power to the audience in relation to the stage production by claiming:

[...] Let me not,
 Since I have my dukedom got
 And pardoned the deceiver, dwell
 In this bare island by your spell,
 But release me from my bands 327
 With the help of your good hands.
 Gentle breath of yours my sails
 Must fill, or else my project fails,
 Which was to please. Now I want
 Spirits to enforce, art to enchant, 332
 And my ending is despair,
 Unless I be relieved by prayer,
 Which pierces so that it assaults
 Mercy itself and frees all faults.
 As you from crimes would pardoned be, 337
 Let your indulgence set me free.³⁷

While Prospero, like a high priest of theatre, suggests that he can transform applause and cheers (“Gentle breath,” l. 329) into a form of efficacious prayer (and the clapping into a lifting up of the hands), cheeky Puck is less grandiose, but both speakers insist

35 The conventional gesture is especially meaningful if, as Lopez 2003, p. 33, suggests, “more than any other drama, early modern drama talks about and openly solicits applause,” both as an expression of the connection between stage and audience and as a means of determining the value of a play; cf. Lopez 2003, p. 34. To bolster his claim, Lopez cites an intriguing passage from William Prynne’s antitheatrical *Histrio-Mastix* in which hands are tainted by their intimate association with the theatre: “if we believe *Tertullian*, these Applauses so pollute men’s hands, that they can neither lift them up to God in prayer, nor yet stretch them out to receive the Sacrament in an holy manner. God requires Christians to lift up holy hands to him in prayer: to bring cleaned, washed, pure hands and hearts unto his sacraments, not tainted with the filth of any sinne. Now Stage-applauses defile mens hands and hearts, making them so polluted, that they can neither lift them up in prayers ... nor yet extend them to embrace Christs’ saved Body and Blood, without defilement” (Lopez 2003, p. 33).

36 See also the prologue to *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, as discussed above, which mentions the dependence of playwrights and players on the audience’s “helping hands” (l. 26).

37 Shakespeare: *The Tempest*, 5.1.323–338.

that the audience must make a contribution, that they have to lend a hand (both literally and metaphorically), lest the theatrical project fail. Both Puck and Prospero make mutual dependencies explicit, and they base an aesthetics of mutual giving in the figure of the active hand, clapping, lifted up, and extended towards a partner on stage.³⁸

6. Conclusion

We have tried to show how one figure, *giving*, or *giving-and-taking*, serves to unlock several dimensions of collaborative authorship. *Giving* is a concept and metaphor that arises from the social world, and this social dimension comes with it whenever it is applied. Aesthetic creation is impossible without words, ideas, drafts, manuscripts, money, etc. being *given* and *taken*. Accordingly, co-creativity and collaboration appear as the default rather than the exception, once the production process is considered in terms of *giving*. But *giving*, when used as a figure of aesthetic reflection, does more than that. In each of our exemplary cases, the transcendence of limits and limitations becomes the issue when the figure is adopted. In our first two examples, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and Herbert's poem *A Wreath*, collaboration as *giving* transcends the limitations of time. Chaucer may *give* something to the present work, and Fletcher and Shakespeare, by conceptualizing his role in this way, turn him into an (awesome) partner in the present stage business. *Giving* allows us to regard "source" authors as collaborators. In Herbert's poem, *giving* transcends time by serving to express the problem of origin in poetic production: only by being given something can one give, but, at least for the human speaker, the giving is also the precondition of receiving what one needs. In presenting this defiance of temporality as the exchange of a human speaker with God, Herbert also uses *giving* to bring up the limitation of faculties. The wish to give makes one aware of what one does not have, and the collaborator (who in Herbert's case is also the receiver of the gift) must make up for it. This is what we have seen in the Whitney emblem: the one gives what the other lacks. The mutual *giving* of faculties with a common aim, creating a work, can be noted in the (inter-)medial and formal character of the work itself; both *A Wreath* and the Whitney emblem make thus manifest what they reflect upon. The exchange negotiated by the self-reflexive form of the epilogue also has an important temporal dimension: the gift of the play precedes the gift of audience recognition. Moreover, epilogues engage with the *topos* of transcending limitations. *Giving* here may serve to express yet another limit to be transcended, namely that of the work itself. Both the aesthetic otherness of its fictional representation and its meaning and intended effect are null and void without those for whom it has been made. It cannot

38 On a related note, Alison Findlay 2020 has examined the functions of "the language of inclusivity" in Shakespearean epilogues (ideological interpellation in her estimation).

become a gift without the audience giving in turn. *Giving* thus takes the collaboratively produced aesthetic artefact back to the social world from which it has derived this figure of reflection.³⁹ Our ending is therefore just a beginning, with new questions: what about hierarchy, for example? Does *giving* itself get a different meaning⁴⁰ when used for the collaborative creation of an artefact, and does this meaning reflect back on its social uses? Such obvious questions show how well our metaphor serves to explain an aesthetics of co-creativity that connects the momentum of literary production with its many social functions.

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39 As the example of *A Wreath* has shown, this social world may even comprise God, who is far above the human speaker and yet familiarly invoked by him as the one who is to give him “simplicitie.” Such hierarchical yet still interdependent collaborative processes are also considered in Herbert’s other poetry, e.g., *Dialogue*.

40 Contrast with the perspective of Mauss 1923/1924.

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