

# Ecdotica

*Fondata da Francisco Rico,  
con Gian Mario Anselmi  
ed Emilio Pasquini*



# Ecdotica

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# Questioni

## THE TEXTS OF SHAKESPEARE

PETER M.W. ROBINSON

Margaret Jane Kidnie, Sonia Massai (ed.), *Shakespeare and Textual Studies*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 467. £78.99. ISBN 9781107023741.

The American textual scholar and theorist Peter Shillingsburg – editor of Thackeray, author of *Scholarly Editing in the Computer Age*, and much else – in the course of a series of debates around the turn of the millennium with Bodo Plachta on the nature and merits of Anglo-American editing against German editing, was apt to observe that the differences between the two traditions of textual scholarship could be explained by the dominance of Shakespeare and Goethe in the two traditions. On the one hand, Shakespearian textual problems are shaped by the nature of the early printed editions of his plays (with the notorious drinking habits of English pressmen a key factor); on the other hand, German scholarly editing begins with the rich authorial manuscript materials available for Goethe (for example: in «“The subject of our mirth”; the aesthetic object in Anglo-American editing», in *Perspectives of Scholarly Editing*, ed. B. Plachta, H.T.M. van Vliet, Berlin, Weidler Buchverlag Berlin, 2002, pp. 47-59). Whatever one thinks of this comparison, the central place of Shakespeare in English life and his dominance of school curricula has led to a continuing demand for new and better editions, in turn moulding ideas of what “new” and “better” means across the whole domain of textual scholarship. Alan Farmer’s essay (*Shakespeare as leading playwright in print, 1598-1608/9*) in this collection shows this demand for “new and better” as manifest even in the earliest quartos printed in Shakespeare’s own life, in title-page assertions that particular print-

ings represent «corrected» and «augmented» texts. Jill Levenson's essay («Framing Shakespeare: introductions and commentary in critical editions of the plays») divides the four centuries of publication of Shakespeare into four phases: the first printings, sometimes rich in preliminaries but lacking notes; the eighteenth century editions which provide prefaces and commentaries; the twentieth century editions made in the shadow of the New Bibliography, with their concentration on textual matters; and lately editions (both print and online) which look far beyond the single acts of publication to the whole cultural arena in which they live.

The history of Shakespeare editing in English is, then, the history of textual editing in English. One can extend Levenson's categorization of the four phases of publication to the understandings of textuality and editorial responsibility which underlie the changes in editing Shakespeare over the centuries. First, there were just texts, barely adorned by title-page rhetoric; then as Shakespeare's prestige grew, editors saw their tasks as recovery, correction and definition, wrapped in cloaks of commentary; then the New Bibliographers brought a new attention to the acts of publication themselves and how an editor must use this knowledge in the course of the edition; finally, we are in the age when everything must be examined and made known. Of course, the identification of the editing of Shakespeare with textual editing in English is too simple, for all periods and all contexts. In the eighteenth century one can argue that Shakespeare editors were responding to the model of editing then seen in the classics, where Bentley and others sought to perfect texts by emendation. In the twentieth century, the influence was very much in the other direction, as ideas of printing house analysis, copytext, accidentals and substantives spread from Shakespeare editors across the editorial landscape. Most recently, the expansive notions of editing implicit in «social texts» (McGann, McKenzie) can be seen in the ambitious efforts of the University of Victoria Internet Shakespeare editions.

Any book on editing should be of interest to any editor, in any area. The co-dependency, between textual scholarship in all of its varieties and Shakespeare editing makes this volume of special interest. This is a substantial volume: 25 essays and an introduction, extending over 414 pages of densely-packed text. Further, the essays are thoughtfully grouped into six sections, focussing each group on a particular area while ensuring a broad coverage of the multiple issues incident upon the editing of Shakespeare. In the first part, *Scripts and Manuscripts*, essays by Hirschfield, Werstein and Purkis look at what can be inferred about the



manuscript materials underlying the print editions. Hirschfeld's essay on authorship, collaboration and attribution profits from recent work on collaboration, notably Jeffrey Masten's *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance* (1997), itself drawing on Barthes, Foucault and other postmodern theorists, and profits too from the many critiques of Masten's work. This essay also touches upon how digital methods have influenced the argument, with appropriate scepticism. Werstine's article takes up W.W. Greg's identification of Ralph Crane's primacy as the King's Men scribe responsible for many of the First Folio comedies, contrasting his work with the other named company scribe associated with Shakespeare, Edward Knight, to conclude that the term "scribal copy" must be understood in many ways. Purkis focusses on the famous few pages of *The Booke of Sir Thomas Moore* (London, British Library, Harley MS 7986 – not MS Harley 7986 as Purkis p. 40 gives it, the British Library is very careful about these things), analyzing it alongside other surviving "playhouse manuscripts" and reaching another conclusion which avoids simple categorization: there is no easy reduction of documents to either "original text" or "theatrical revision".

This move towards more nuanced, sceptical and complex understandings extends though the volume (as indeed, one could say that the same move characterizes post-Bowers Anglophone textual scholarship). The second section, *Making books; building reputations*, unpicks elements of what one might term the standard narrative of Shakespeare in early print: that he was an unstoppable success, and that Shakespeare was indifferent to the first print productions of his plays. Sonia Massai points out that the Shakespeare print juggernaut appeared to hit a bump on the road from 1603 to 1616: after the waterfall of quartos from 1598 to 1603, just four plays written by Shakespeare after 1603 were published before his death in 1616. Massai's explanation is elegant: the decline in Shakespeare publication was the result of a whole shift in the market towards the publication of plays written for the children's companies. This is a reminder that often the best explanations of Shakespeare, or indeed any author, lie in examination of the context in which the author moved: an argument for more and more background research. Helen Smith provides a useful roadmap to the printing and physical bibliography of the first phase of Shakespeare prints, up to 1598 when his name first appears on title pages. Alan Farmer continues the narrative of printings up to 1608, and focusses on evidence that Shakespeare was (contrary to the standard narrative) actually involved in the printing of

his plays in “correct” texts to a degree greater than any other contemporary author – more, indeed, than Ben Jonson, who is usually advanced as a model of authorial care to which Shakespeare fails to aspire. In the process, Farmer complicates our sense of Shakespeare as an author: he is not only producing texts for the theatre, he is seeing them into print. Zachary Lesser and Peter Stallybrass advance the narrative past the end of Shakespeare’s life, to 1619, explaining how publishers experimented with different formulations of distinguishing their publications by various invocations of authorial ascription. Along the way, they deliver a bibliographic master class in the deconstruction of the bibliographic fiction of the so-called “Pavier Quartos”, which earlier scholars have seen as a first attempt to create a collection of Shakespeare’s plays. Lesser and Stallybrass show convincingly that the so-called “Pavier Quartos” are a modern invention of the “New Bibliography”, and on the basis of a bravura analysis of the distribution of stab-stitch holes in the surviving copies they argue that there is no such single thing as the “Pavier Quartos”. Instead, they are multiple productions of an enterprising London bookseller, William Jaggard, who sought to offload various surplus printings by binding them together. Far from being a move towards a Shakespeare collection, the foundation of these printings seems to have been surplus copies of Heywood’s *Woman Killed*, which Jaggard tried to dispose of by smuggling it into various Shakespearian collections. The final essay in this part, by Emma Smith, completes the cycle, focussing on Shakespeare in print with analysis of the character lists in the 1623 first Folio. Again, the traditional narrative is complicated. Where the dedications to the volume claim a high level of editorial care, the casual treatment of the character lists with their many mistakes and inconsistencies undercuts this narrative.

The title of the third section, *From print to manuscript*, suggests a reversion. After their printing, we find the traces of readership of the plays in manuscript form. Laura Estill’s “Commonplacing readers” records the appearance of Shakespeare in common-place books, written by students, clergy, and even an Archbishop of Canterbury. Jean-Christophe Mayer, in «Annotating and transcribing for the theatre: Shakespeare’s early modern reader-revisers at work», surveys the mark-up of printed texts for performance, and complete manuscript copies of the printed plays, adapted for performance. Jeffrey Todd Knight’s «Shakespeare and the collection: reading beyond readers’ marks» looks at readers’ marks in early print copies, pointing out that study of readerly involvement through analysis of such marks (a pursuit suddenly academically fashionable) must, in the con-

text of Shakespeare, look much more widely than the notes themselves, examining how works are “collected”: within a bound volume, within a library and within still larger networks. Knight shows how this may be done for the “collection” of Shakespeare by Garrick and Kemble. Alan Galey’s «Encoding as editing as reading» takes the argument in a quite different direction: he argues that encoding texts for the computer is also a form of reading. His descriptions of his own various experiments, typically when teaching encoding, are compelling instances of how questions about encoding lead to the heart of much larger questions: what is a text? And what is it, to “read”? W.B. Worthen’s «Shax the app» continues the voyage into the digital, by way of Derridean theory and postcard plays, into the world of apps, and offers an efficient review of various performance and teaching apps. There is a millennial feel to his language: we are heading towards a state of «textual transcendentalism» (p. 229), which we can only hope will not be too painful. Already, in my own classes, I see students reading far more on their phones than in books. Watch this space.

The fourth section, *Editorial legacies*, moves away from the plays and their printing to look at aspects of how editors over the centuries have sought to present the plays. Peter Holland’s «Theatre editions» ingeniously contrasts two editions, one from 1676 and one from 2009, which sought to present *Hamlet* as a theatrical object. His essay shows well how little print can convey of the «complex and messy world of the theatre» (p. 238). As he observes – and this volume shows – «theatre-linked editions of Shakespeare tend to get short shrift» (p. 239). Nonetheless, there are gems here, not least Samuel French’s Acting Editions, which fossilize the Forbes-Robertson 1897 production of *Hamlet* forever. Keir Alam takes another route, looking at the use made of illustration in Shakespeare editions. His *Editing Shakespeare by pictures: illustrated editions* is in part a record of increasing technical sophistication enabling new illustrative possibilities; in part it is a record of cultural change, as illustrations show how each generation liked to see: decorative, discursive, iconographic, rococo, all have their day, ending in a climax with a Manga *Tempest* from 2007. *Format and readerships* by Andrew Murphy packs in a wealth of information about the many forms Shakespeare printing took, from tiny matchbox sized editions (good for stealing) to costly de-luxe multi-volume wallet-busters. Jeff Bezos of Amazon might have been schooled by James Lackington, whose motto was «SMALL PROFITS DO GREAT THINGS», and who (around 1790) increased the number of buyers by squeezing the price, firstly by aggressive pursuit of

remaindered stock. Murphy again brings us to the digital era, and again concludes with the same Manga *Tempest*. Leah Marcus' «A man who needs no introduction» returns us to the world of editions, focussing again on *The Tempest* (is this deliberate policy in this volume?) through its editions and particularly their editorial introductions. For those of us who grew up with our texts of Shakespeare indissolubly yoked to editorial introductions, it is something of a shock to discover that the elaborate editorial frontispiece to the text is a comparatively recent innovation; even more of a surprise to discover the protean forms the introductions for just one play may take (though, admittedly, the colonial concerns of *The Tempest* render it particularly liable to shifting intellectual currents) – and finally, disorientating to reflect that we may be seeing the end of «The Introduction» as editions turn to the Web, with its inclination to undercut the monolithic infallibility affected by traditional introductions. Little loss, some may think, though I for one will always associate *Hamlet* with John Dover Wilson's voice echoing in some far-away vault. The last essay in the section, «Emendation and the editorial reconfiguration of Shakespeare» by Lukas Erne, takes us into the decades-long war between “uneditors” and “editors”. Both sides, as Erne shows, have paradox at their heart: the more one edits, the more one stacks accretions on the text; the more one unedits, the more one sees that texts are accretions. Erne provocatively associates the two schools with “catholic” and “protestant” modes of thought. Like most such metaphors, this can take us a good way: this time round, the advent of the digital (which in this volume often appears as a numinous cloud) offers to shift the ground towards “unediting”. One may confidently predict a backlash.

The title of the fifth section, *Editorial practices*, shifts the discussion to what editors might do in particular cases. At times, one feels this volume is discourse-heavy: a lot of words about words, so that Stallybrass and Lesser's analysis of stab-stitch holes is welcome relief. Similarly, the essays in this section grapple with specific material difficulties. John Jowett's «Full pricks and great p's: spellings, punctuation, accidentals» concentrates on the smallest editorial units, punctuation marks and spellings. Alan Dessing («Divided Shakespeare: Configuring Acts and Scenes») looks at the confusions caused as editors try to impose act and scene breaks on plays which did not have them. Matthew Dimmock's «Shakespeare's strange tongues: editors and the 'foreign' voice in Shakespearean drama» looks at the many “strange” voices in Shakespeare's plays: foreign languages, dialects, inflected speech of all kinds, and how editors might represent them, or fail to represent them. Tiffany Stern's essay «Before the

beginning; after the end: when did plays start and stop» extends the discussion of act and scene breaks to consider how the beginning and end of performances are problematic events, and how they might be marked. The common thread in all four essays is that there are no easy choices, and indeed almost no good choices. Theatre is living speech and action: nailing it to the print page (or computer screen) is always going to be brutal. The four hundred years between ourselves and Shakespeare, and all the linguistic and cultural changes which have interceded, call to mind how an Oxford English Dictionary editor once defined to me his task: it is clog-dancing on quicksand. So indeed is Shakespeare editing. What we might think of as simple matters – the distinction between accidentals and substantives, how to mark breaks within play action (geometric tudor roses? treble clefs?), to signal the opening and closing of the action (trumpeters? songs? dances?), how to punctuate (and not to punctuate) Morrocco's speeches in *The Merchant of Venice*: nothing is simple. As Stern puts it in the last sentence of the section: the one editorial strategy which cannot be deployed is ignorance.

The final section begins with Jill Levenson's «Framing Shakespeare» essay, already referred to above and here placed in the context of a section titled *Apparatus and the fashioning of knowledge*. Levenson's contribution overflows this section, to the point that it would have made an excellent introduction to the whole volume. For a reader such as myself, who knows something of textual scholarship but whose area of specialization lies outside Shakespeare (and many readers will fit this profile), this essay provides an excellent way into the huge subject of editing Shakespeare over four hundred years. That said, the most interesting part of the essay is Levenson's reflections on a half-century of her own involvement in Shakespeare editing, all the way from Alfred Harbage's graduate class in editing at Harvard in 1964 (it is startling how many key events in this book are referred to that year), through her work with Stanley Wells in the 1980s on *Romeo and Juliet* for the Oxford Shakespeare, to the latest digital editions. Eric Rasmussen's «Editorial memory: the origin and evolution of collation notes» begins with a repertoire of the hostile things people have said about variant apparatus, proceeds through a useful summary of the history of Shakespearean textual apparatus, and ends with a satisfyingly precise description of what a digital textual apparatus might offer, thanks to the imaginative efforts of the MLA *Shakespeare Variorum* group and the intense effort of the New Variorum *Hamlet*, in which both Rasmussen and Galey from this volume are involved. It is fitting then that the last essay in the volume, David Weinberger's «Shakespeare as network»,

looks toward a capacious and glittering future, in which all that we might ever want to do with Shakespeare – images of all the printings, transcripts, commentaries, variant texts, performances, records of sources and the sources themselves, comments and annotations of every kind – is all available, all linked together, out there on the web. I must declare an interest here: I advocate for something very similar for Shakespeare, though I call it a “coral reef” built by us all, one polyp at a time, in an article «Project-based digital humanities and social, digital and scholarly editions» (*Digital Studies in the Humanities*, a. XXI [2016], pp. 875-889). Indeed, much of this is already happening, as the HamletWorks.org and Internet Shakespeare Editions and associated enterprises show. Weinberger offers many specific useful suggestions as to how this network may be populated. I am concerned, as Weinberger apparently is not, that we may have done the easy things. To build the network toward the vision Weinberger sets out may require levels of altruism beyond those usually associated with individual scholars, libraries and archives. Open access is the key, as Galey and Weinberger note. The trouble is, we all want Open Access to everyone else’s material, while maintaining strict control over our own.

Thirty-seven pages of «Works Cited» and a sixteen-page index round out the volume. Yet, such is the range of the subject, one feels that the volume could have been yet larger. One misses the kind of detailed printing house analysis which has done so much to illuminate Shakespeare scholarship over the years, and is still being practiced by (among others) Gabriel Egan, Eric Rasmussen and Anthony West. A successor volume might usefully take this up: omitting this study might give the impression that the course of New Bibliography is run (partly true) and that detailed physical analysis has no more to teach (not true at all). This raises the question: successor to exactly what? The title *Shakespeare and Textual Studies* implies a fixity of subject appropriate to a single magisterial survey. But the landscape of continuing change at every level which every essay in the volume attests, change which looks only to accelerate as the digital turn reaches into every corner of scholarship, means that the book becomes something else. It becomes a *status quaestionis* volume, with even dry historical surveys of the printing of Shakespeare’s plays coloured by the changing thinking of the last decades. One could well imagine that by 2025, ten years after the publication of this volume, quite enough will have changed for there to be a successor volume.

The rush to the web, the rise of online peer-reviewed collections, usually available free, leads one to question: is there a future for publications made, as this one was, by a large University Press and sold at a high price

for each volume? The last sentence of the acknowledgements offers the «greatest thanks» to Sarah Stanton, the editor at Cambridge University Press responsible for this and other Shakespeare-related publications at the Press (p. xiv). From my own experience, I know how much Stanton (and her colleagues over the years, Kevin Taylor and Andrew Brown) are crucial to a publication such as this, at every point «inclusive, thoughtful, and accurate» as Levenson puts it (p. 378). Their effort is invisible but all pervasive. They are the catalyst which create the uniformity, focus, consistency, and excellence evident throughout this volume. We may hope that in the network foreseen by Weinberger there is a place for such a Press, and for such editors as Stanton.

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