Sonia Massai’s central claim in this book is that the texts of early printed editions of Renaissance drama, including Shakespeare’s, did not simply ‘degenerate’ or ‘corrupt’ over time, as subsequent editions were printed using their immediate predecessor as their basis. By focusing on early correctors of dramatic texts for the press, this book identifies a previously overlooked category of textual agents involved in the circulation of early English drama in print and challenges the common assumption that the first editor of Shakespeare was Nicholas Rowe, who published his edition of Shakespeare’s Works in 1709. This study offers the first sustained account of a ‘prehistory’ of editing from the rise of English drama in print at the beginning of the sixteenth century to the official rise of the editorial tradition of Shakespeare at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Massai’s argument forces us to consider that our understanding of what editing is and what it should do may be at odds with early modern understandings of the text of printed playbooks as both imperfect and continually and progressively perfectible.

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SHAKESPEARE AND THE RISE OF THE EDITOR

SONIA MASSAI
For Bianca, Cosimo, 
Elda and Giulio
## Contents

*List of illustrations and tables*  
*Acknowledgements*  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PART I</strong> * THE RISE OF ENGLISH DRAMA IN PRINT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 English humanism and the publication of early Tudor drama</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Italian influences on the publication of late Tudor drama</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PART II</strong> * THE RISE OF SHAKESPEARE IN PRINT*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 The Wise Quartos (1597–1602)</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 The Pavier Quartos (1619)</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 The making of the First Folio (1623)</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Perfecting Shakespeare in the Fourth Folio (1685)</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Illustrations and tables

1 Page of text: *The Pedlar’s Prophecy*, 1595, STC 25782
   Reproduced by permission of the British Library, London

2 Page of text: *The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon*, 1601, STC 18271
   Reproduced by permission of the British Library, London

3 Page of text: *A Knack to Know a Knave*, 1594, STC 15027
   Reproduced by permission of the British Library, London

4 Page of text: *Tamburlaine*, 1606, STC 17428a
   Reproduced by permission of the British Library, London

5 Page of text: *Orlando Furioso*, 1599, STC 12266
   Reproduced by permission of the British Library, London

6 Page of text: *The Malcontent*, 1604, STC 17480
   Reproduced by permission of the British Library, London

7 Page of text: *The Maid’s Tragedy*, 1638, STC 1680
   Reproduced by permission of the Bodleian Library, Oxford

8 Page of text: *Edward I*, 1593, STC 19535
   Reproduced by permission of the British Library, London

9 Page of text: *Othello*, 1622, STC 22305
   Reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California

10 Page of text: *Othello*, 1622, STC 22305
    Reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California

11 Page of text: *Othello*, 1622, STC 22305
    Reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California

12 Page of text: *Othello*, 1622, STC 22305
    Reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California
List of illustrations and tables

13 Page of text: *Othello*, 1622, *STC* 22305
   Reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California 29
14 Woodcut: From Thomas More’s *Utopia*, 3rd edition, 1518, by Ambrosius Holbein
   Reproduced by permission of the Cambridge University Library 50
15 Painting: *Portrait of Erasmus*, by Quentin Massys, 1517
   Reproduced by permission of Royal Enterprises, London 52
16 Painting: *Portrait of Peter Giles*, by Quentin Massys, 1517
   Reproduced by permission of the Koninklijk Museum, Antwerp 53
17 Page of text: *Fulgens and Lucrece*, 1512–16?, *STC* 17778
   Reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California 63
18 Page of text: *Fulgens and Lucrece*, 1512–16?, *STC* 17778
   Reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California 65
19 Page of text: *Fulgens and Lucrece*, 1512–16?, *STC* 17778
   Reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California 66
20 Page of text: *Richard II*, 1597, *STC* 22307
   Reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California 94

Tables
3.1 Books published by Andrew Wise (1593–1602) 96
4.1 The ‘Pavier Quartos’ (1619) 107
Acknowledgements

This book would not have been written if one day in the now distant summer of the year 2000 Thomas L. Berger had not taken the time to discuss my recent work on Nahum Tate over lunch and had not encouraged me to find other ‘editors’ of Shakespeare before the publication of Nicholas Rowe’s edition of Shakespeare’s Works in 1709. Long before and since then Professor Berger had been and has continued to be one of the most inspiring teachers and scholars I have had the pleasure to work with. Thank you, Tom! I am also greatly indebted to other colleagues who have kindly read my book, and to Margaret Jane Kidnie and James Purkis in particular, who read the entire typescript at the most inconvenient of times, between Christmas and New Year’s Eve 2005. They generously spared the time to give me invaluable feedback which has helped me refine and adjust some of the theories and arguments I explore in this book. I am also deeply grateful to John Jowett, who read my chapter on the ‘Pavier Quartos’ and an earlier version of my chapter on ‘The making of the First Folio’.

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