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Introduction: reading W. W. Greg

This book is an extended essay in New Bibliography. There is widespread consensus that New Bibliographical understanding of the publication of plays begins with the work of A. W. Pollard (Greg 1942, 2; Wilson 1945, 16; Egan 2010, 12–24). Pollard was Keeper of Printed Books at the British Library (1919–24) and author of, among many other works, *Shakespeare Folios and Quartos: A Study in the Bibliography of Shakespeare's Plays, 1594–1685* (1909) and *Shakespeare's Fight with the Pirates and the Problems of the Transmission of his Text* (1917). With these books he sought to change the course of Shakespeare editing in his own time by addressing editors' attention to documentary evidence. It is in this spirit of the New Bibliography that the present study is designed to proceed. As Pollard appreciated, Shakespeare editors, without any of the MSS that served as printer's copy for Shakespeare's plays or the plays of his contemporaries, are obliged to infer the nature of such copy from the study of the plays in MS that do survive.[1] One of Pollard's most original and influential New Bibliographical claims is that MSS written in Shakespeare's own hand may have served as printer's copy for some of the earliest printed versions of the plays.[2] This claim rests on Pollard's knowledge of surviving dramatic MSS, including those with playhouse provenance. He knew that there survive MS plays in their authors' own hands; he cited, among others, Philip Massinger's *Beleeue*, Thomas Heywood's *Captives*, Walter Mountfort's *Lanchinge*, and the anonymous *Noble Ladys* (1917, 59–61), to use the short titles for these MSS that will be used throughout this study (for the list of short titles, see pp. xiv–xv). What distinguishes these MSS for Pollard is the presence of annotation in them in other hands – annotation that establishes their playhouse provenance. Since the playhouse is, both in Pollard's time and ours, judged to be the source of printer's copy for many of the publishers of plays, documentary evidence of the preservation of authors' copies in playhouses creates the possibility that the dramatists' own

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papers could have served as the basis for printed texts, including those of Shakespeare, whose canonical plays come to us only in printed form.

Pollard thereby turned Shakespeare textual criticism and editing in a new direction by providing a possible answer to the question of "the sources of Shakespeare's plays." Only a very few years before, W. W. Greg had declared that "At present we lack evidence sufficient to decide the question" (1903, 282–3). Early in his career, Greg worked very closely with Pollard (Pollard 1909, vj) and later credited Pollard with initiating "discussion" (1955, 105) of the nature of the MS copy for Shakespeare's plays, discussion that Greg did so much to advance. While Pollard may have suggested the direction of further study, it was Greg who carried such study forward in the course of a great deal of writing, but most prominently first through his cataloguing and description of *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses* (1931) and then through his successive applications of this research to the determination of printer's copy for Shakespeare's plays in *The Editorial Problem in Shakespeare* (1942) and *The Shakespeare First Folio* (1955). In the course of his work on MSS and Shakespeare's printed plays, Greg came to believe that "the two most important sources of the extant texts are probably the author's foul papers and theatrical prompt-books" (1942, 156), categories of putative printer's copy that he had already worked out by 1925 (1925a, 153).

Greg defined "foul papers" as follows: "a copy representing the play more or less as the author intended it to stand, but not itself clear or tidy enough to serve as a prompt-book" because it contained "loose ends and false starts, and unresolved confusions" (1955, 106, 142) and because this kind of manuscript was "at times illegible [as well as] full of deletions, corrections, and alterations" (1927a, 4, 3). A "promptbook," for Greg, was in the "more usual" case (1942, 33) a playhouse MS, a transcript of "foul papers" by a theatrical scribe in which many of the defects of the "foul papers" would have been repaired; the "promptbook," according to Greg (and as no one would dispute), was also marked up as a guide to performance and often, but not always (e.g., *Barnauelt*: 1931, 1:199–200, 202, 204), bore at its end a license for performance inscribed and signed by the Master of the Revels. (As long as an authorial MS was not untidy "foul papers," it could, Greg thought, possibly, if less usually [1942, 33], serve as a "promptbook.") However, Greg further supposed that a "promptbook" would be likely to be reasonably consistent and unambiguous in naming roles in SDD and SPP (1955, 114), and would contain a complete and accurate complement of SPP and SDD, the latter specifying all speaking roles and enumerating all supers (1942, 36–7; 1955, 112). In contrast to "foul papers," a "promptbook,"

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for Greg, would be fully legible and tidy in appearance (1931, 1:200–3), and it would tie up loose ends, eliminate false starts, and otherwise resolve confusions (1955, 142).[3]

Greg's categories of "foul papers" and "promptbooks" were adopted by his fellow New Bibliographer John Dover Wilson in an exhaustive study of *Hamlet* of 1934 (1: 89–90) and in many of his subsequent editions and revised editions in the New Shakespeare series, and then by almost all the editors of the Second Edition of the New Arden Shakespeare, beginning in the 1950s. Thereafter Greg's distinction has informed, with a few exceptions detailed below in chapter 1, editorial policy and decision-making in twentieth- and early twenty-first-century editing of Shakespeare. Editors' reading of Greg has persuaded them to believe that they can make a choice in the case of a number of Shakespeare plays to present their readers either with the versions closest to their author (following the printings based on "foul papers") or with the versions that were staged (following the printings of "promptbooks"). The controversial hypothesis that Shakespeare revised his plays is also ultimately built on Greg's work, which thereby serves as a foundation for the 1986 Oxford Shakespeare (Wells *et al.*) with, for example, its two versions of *King Lear*, one presented as Shakespeare's original version, the other as his revision. E. A. J. Honigmann, one of the founders of the revisionist school of editorial thought, characterizes Shakespeare as writing the first version of a play in "foul papers" and then transcribing and, in doing so, revising this version in his own preparation of the "promptbook" (1965, 7–21). So influential is Greg's understanding of the early modern "promptbook" that it continues to appear in twenty-first-century accounts of playhouse texts. Writing the second book on dramatic MSS from around Shakespeare's time (after Greg's own 1931 *Dramatic Documents*) titled *Dramatists and their Manuscripts in the Age of Shakespeare, Jonson, Middleton, and Heywood*, Grace Ioppolo states "Playhouse scribes could and did regularise the text, for example, in making consistent throughout the text the placement and use of entrance and exit directions, speech prefixes, properties and names of characters" (2006, 8). Thus, while the present study is engaged for the most part with scholarship from 1955 and before, its conclusions are crucial to the state of editing Shakespeare and his contemporaries today.

In spite (and perhaps to some extent because) of wide and persistent acceptance of Greg's categories in the Shakespeare editorial community, these categories, especially "foul papers," have been the object of penetrating critique almost from the time that Greg made them available, as chapter 1 makes evident. In recent decades, as documented by Gabriel Egan in his

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history of the New Bibliography and its reception and as noted by Andrew Murphy in his biography of Greg, the attack on these categories has been launched for the most part from positions within post-structuralist philosophy (Egan 2010, 163; Murphy 2011, 107).[4] According to Egan, no one yet has mounted a persuasive case on empirical grounds for the dismissal of Greg's conceptions of "foul papers" and "promptbooks": "In surveying the attacks on New Bibliography it is striking how seldom its adherents have been proved wrong on the hard facts of a case" (2010, vii).[5] The object of the present essay in New Bibliography is to fill this gap in Shakespeare editorial scholarship by revisiting in detail chiefly the MSS (but also the early printed Shakespeare texts) on which Greg's categories have been raised. Only by presenting evidence from these documents according to the established practice of New Bibliography from the time of Pollard is it possible to demonstrate that New Bibliography's most enduring editorial categories are invalid.

Therefore this book is anchored by the section titled "The manuscripts," which focuses in turn on nineteen MSS and three annotated quartos. Twenty-one of these texts (all of them, that is, except for *Bonduca*) contain annotation for stage production, usually, in the case of the MSS, in other hands than those in which the main text is inscribed.[6] They are the sources of evidence for and/or against Greg's conception of "promptbook." We may not be completely sure that of about a hundred play manuscripts and countless copies of printed plays extant from this period only these twenty-one were actually used in the playhouses. Some of the twenty-one, notably Anthony Munday's MS of *Kent*, from the 1590s, and Walter Mountfort's MS of *Lanchinge*, from the early 1630s, are so sparsely annotated for production that it seems probable that some MSS or printed texts without *any* annotation whatsoever may well have served the same purpose in the playhouse that these did (Baldwin 1965, 39–40; Stern 2009, 230).[7] Nonetheless, William B. Long, the most serious student of this field for nearly forty years, seems right to regard the eighteen MSS in this class (to which I add the three annotated quartos) as what he calls the "precious few" that give us knowledge of "what kinds of manuscript playwrights delivered to the playing companies and . . . [of] how the players altered these manuscripts in putting plays into production" (1999, 414). That is, while we cannot be sure that these twenty-one were the only texts that have such provenance, we can be sure that these are the only ones that we can know to have such provenance.[8] I have personally examined all twenty-two of the texts in "The manuscripts," in almost all cases on more than one occasion, some over and over again.

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It is to "The manuscripts" that readers should turn if they are interested in the fierce particulars of each of these twenty-one playhouse MSS and annotated quartos or in the history of scholarly debate about them. These are there presented in as brief and as accessible a way as possible in view of the complexity of some of the issues. (The comparable particulars for *Bonduca*, which is included in this study for reasons that will soon become clear, are presented in chapter 2.) Is the paper the same throughout a MS? How many different inks are there? How many hands – i.e., distinguishable styles of handwriting? Is the MS an authorial or a scribal copy? (It should be noted that the MSS that most resist identification as one or the other are *Kent*, *Moore*, *Charlemagne*, and *Woodstock*.) If scribal, does the scribe appear to be a playhouse scribe or not? Is the scribe a known historical figure – Ralph Crane or Edward Knight – or anonymous? Can his hand(s) be found in other playhouse MSS? Is an annotating bookkeeper an historical figure like Knight, recorded to be with the King's Company in the 1620s and 1630s, or anonymous? Can he be found making production notes in other playhouse MSS? If so, how consistent or variable is he in his practices? A great deal of fine and meticulous scholarly work (much of it by Greg himself) has been addressed to such questions in these MSS in the course of over a century of investigation. Beyond synthesizing that work, I occasionally have a further contribution to make, such as authenticating Anthony Munday's signature at the end of *Kent*, or making a case for *Charlemagne* as a scribal transcription, or establishing the limits for the identification of inks and hands in *Woodstock*, or discriminating among the hands annotating *Looking glasse*. The most original contribution to scholarship in "The manuscripts," though, comes in the discussion of a number of the texts' theatrical provenance and especially of the likelihood that they were used to guide performance. Those who have addressed these issues before have often concentrated almost exclusively on the individual MSS that they were transcribing or editing, and, if they were working after Greg developed his conception of "promptbook" as described above, they used that conception as their guide. Instead, I have evaluated the possibility of the use of any particular MS in performance by situating it in the context of the other twenty theatrical texts discussed in "The manuscripts."

The chapters of this book are, to a large extent, readings of the extensive work of W. W. Greg in conjunction with detailed investigation of the MSS and printed texts that were repeatedly the objects of his study as he arrived at his conceptions of "foul papers" and "promptbooks." My readings of Greg often attend to contradictions in his writing – especially, but not exclusively, those between his early work on dramatic MSS and his later work on

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the Shakespeare printed texts.[9] Were mine a post-structuralist study, I might well be content to stop at the identification of these contradictions. Not writing in the post-structuralist mode, however, I have no interest in pillorying Greg on these contradictions, but instead take them as indications of opportunities for further research. Greg was the pioneering scholar in the field in which I am working, and as his ground-breaking research led him to encounter texts that had previously been very little known, he fearlessly endeavored to articulate the implications for theatrical history and editorial practice of these texts as he came upon them, with little regard to safeguarding a reputation for consistency in his voluminous writing.

One way to present some of the prominent contradictions in Greg's writing is by exploring Edward Pechter's recent claim that "foul papers and promptbooks [are] heuristic rather than empirical categories" (2011, 132). Since the purpose of my book is to demonstrate from empirical evidence that these categories are invalid, I can hardly altogether disagree with Pechter that they are not empirical. Yet they can be shown to be empirical in the limited sense that they grow out of Greg's experience with particular texts. Take, for example, "foul papers." In a review published in early 1925, Greg takes issue with the hypothesis that the Second Quarto of *Hamlet* was set into type from an often illegible authorial manuscript (1925b, 83).[10] Then in 1925 he examines the transcript of *Bonduca* by Edward Knight, who says he is copying "foul papers." Before the year 1925 is out, Greg has published a piece in which he supposes that Knight's term "foul papers" refers to a "rough draft" and that Knight found such papers in the playhouse, although Greg does not yet suppose that such papers ever served as printer's copy for *Hamlet* or any other play (1925a). By 1927, he is characterizing "foul papers" from his inferential reconstruction of the meaning of this term as "at times illegible" (1927a, 4). By 1942, when he has turned his full attention to Shakespeare textual criticism in his published Clark Lectures, he is supposing that the Second Quarto of *Hamlet* itself was printed from such frequently illegible "foul papers" (1942, ix), thereby adopting the very position he ridiculed in print early in 1925 before his experience of the *Bonduca* transcript changed his mind.

Greg also arrives at his conception of "promptbook" through experience, although again through his experience of *Bonduca*'s "foul papers" as he inferentially reconstructs them. In 1922, he writes, "it is on the whole, I think, probable that the prompt-copy would be none other than the author's original manuscript – his autograph fair copy – or, if he employed an amanuensis for this purpose, would at least be produced under his direction and not in the playhouse" (1922a, 46). Following his discovery

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of Knight's reference to "foul papers" and his inference from that discovery to the conception that authors gave acting companies "foul papers" that were, according to his additional inference, not suitable for use in the playhouse, Greg moved toward marginalizing actual playhouse MSS in authors' own hands as special cases (1931, 1:198–203) and toward suggesting, as already noted above, that it was "more usual perhaps" for playhouse MSS to be copies by playhouse scribes (1942, 33), who, in copying the "foul papers," would probably eliminate authorial inconsistencies, ambiguities, inaccuracies, and unresolved confusions (1955, 114, 142). Again we can see experience change Greg's mind. Yet he does not actually find any "foul papers" of the kind that he defines, nor can he produce any "promptbooks" that fit his description of the term, as will be evident from chapters 3 and 4. Thus Greg's practice in arriving at his definitions of "foul papers" and "promptbooks" is best captured by T. W. Baldwin: "Sir Walter's classifications are entirely inferential, without any attempt to derive them historically from actual known instances, though the known historical instances are in the background" (1965, 143).

Chapters 1 and 2 of this book, which examine Greg's conception of "foul papers," follow up another contradiction in Greg's writing, this time a very fruitful one in his developing understanding of the *Bonduca* texts. The *Bonduca* MS is not a playhouse MS in the same sense as are the other texts listed in "The manuscripts." While it is a copy made by a bookkeeper, Knight, who served the King's Company as such in the 1620s and 1630s, and could therefore have been made in the playhouse itself, it contains no production notes and therefore no indication that it was ever associated with performance. Greg returns to the *Bonduca* MS again and again over a thirty-year period. As early as 1927, as he explains in an unpublished essay, he has studied Knight's transcription of what the scribe tells us are Fletcher's "foul papers" well enough to determine that it gives us a bad text. Greg is then confronted by the familiar dilemma of the textual critic, as elegantly phrased by R. B. McKerrow, "whether a bad text is likely to be a bad reproduction of a good manuscript, or a good reproduction of a bad one" (1931, 254). In 1927 Greg opts for the second alternative: for him, the scribe Knight is doing the very best a scribe can do faced with a MS that is "at times illegible [as well as] full of deletions, corrections, and alterations" (1927a, 4, 3). The term "foul papers," for Greg, then comes to refer to just such a manuscript. According to Greg, the text of *Bonduca* that is published in the 1647 Beaumont and Fletcher First Folio (which varies considerably in a few scenes from the text of Knight's transcript) must represent Fletcher's own transcription and revision of his "foul papers" because no one but the author

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himself could have successfully transcribed those papers. Thus Greg altogether dismisses in 1927 the other alternative provided in McKerrow's formulation as explanation for the poor quality of Knight's *Bonduca* transcript – "a bad reproduction of a good manuscript."

By 1951, however, Greg is beginning to change his mind about the *Bonduca* texts. After he completes his MSR edition of Knight's transcript, he wants to leave open the possibility that a scribe, rather than Fletcher himself, may have been the agent who successfully copied the "foul papers" and otherwise modified them in the creation of the text printed in 1647 (1951, xii–xiii). By 1955 Greg is tentatively attributing one of the modifications to "another hand" than Fletcher's (1955, 111). Yet Greg never revisits the broader implications of these suspicions about his attribution of the whole of both extant *Bonduca* texts (the one in Knight's transcript and the 1647 printed version) to Fletcher's unaided authorship. Specifically, he never investigates the possibility that Knight's transcript might be "a bad reproduction of a good manuscript," even though that possibility is made all the more likely than its alternative by Greg's suspicion that someone besides Fletcher was responsible for successfully making a copy and adaptation/revision of the "foul papers" in the creation of the text printed in 1647. Chapter 2 of this book takes up this possibility by way of an investigation of Knight's scribal practices as they are documented in his surviving transcription of *HMF* and then applies the results of this investigation to a re-examination of his copy of *Bonduca* to demonstrate why it should be regarded as "a bad reproduction of a good manuscript" – one that led Greg and all his followers to a mistaken conception of the meaning of the term "foul papers."

Chapters 3 and 4 of this book track yet another contradiction of Greg's, this one regarding his conception of the "promptbook." In his earlier writing about playhouse MSS of 1922 and 1931, Greg situates them in the context of other playhouse documents apparently also used in the course of performance, most notably actors' parts and backstage plots. The latter have been usefully described as "maps" (Tribble 2005, 146) of plays written in larger than usual hands, mounted on placards, and designed to be hung on pegs backstage where they can be readily consulted during performances by members of the acting company. Considered in relation to parts and plots, theatrical playbooks need not, for the early Greg, be regarded as having to bear alone the burden for guiding performance and need not, then, be supposed to be perfectly consistent, unambiguous, complete, and accurate in SPP and SDD. However, as McKerrow documents (Green 2009, 41), Greg's focus later shifts from theatre history to Shakespeare textual criticism; then he falls under the influence of McKerrow, who thinks of

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playhouse personnel as regularizing their MSS so as to provide themselves with comprehensive guides to and records of their performances. It is McKerrow who leads Greg to his later conception of "promptbook," which Greg, for good reason, never quite fully embraces, thereby opening up contradiction even in his later work. Nevertheless, this conception functions in Greg's decisions about the nature of the particular MSS underlying the earliest printed versions of Shakespeare's plays. Chapter 3, informed by reference to Appendix A (titled "Characteristics of Gregian 'foul papers' in playhouse texts"), brings to bear against Greg's method of identifying printer's copy the considerable weight of empirical evidence of the actual playhouse MSS. Then chapter 4 documents bookkeepers' evident practices in these MSS, into which they introduce all manner of inconsistencies, ambiguities, inaccuracies, false starts, and textual duplications of the kind that Greg and McKerrow imagine must originate only with plays' authors and that bookkeepers must have expunged. The purpose of chapters 3 and 4, then, is to set the empirical evidence of playhouse texts against Greg's conception of a "promptbook."

Chapter 5 departs in its focus from the textual and editorial concerns of the rest of this book to embark on a rather more speculative reconstruction, which is nonetheless based as squarely as possible on the evidence of the actual theatrical texts, of the duties of the playhouse personnel who functioned as bookkeepers in anticipation of performance and prompters during performance. The bookkeeper's tasks prior to performance seem many and onerous as he deals on the behalf of the company with the state censor, the Master of the Revels; marks up the playhouse MS for performance; and prepares or supervises the preparation of the backstage plot, the cast list, and the actors' parts. During performance, at least until the 1630s and only then in connection with one acting company, the prompter apparently has his attention dominated by the need to follow the dialogue as it is delivered onstage, so as to be prepared to prompt actors with lines in the event that the flow of speech ceases. Otherwise the prompter seems responsible only for the timing of entrances in relation to dialogue, as well as the timing of the provision of occasional props, music, and noise. In the 1630s, though, with the King's Revels Company, the prompter's job seems to expand to include, probably through intermediaries, readying actors to take the stage at the proper time. Such a reconstruction of playhouse practice from the evidence of the theatrical texts can in turn feed back into understanding of the texts themselves without our ever having ranged very far from the evidence in these texts; we would be left very much in the position occupied by Greg in the 1920s and early 1930s.

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The course of Greg's career, as so briefly sketched in the foregoing account of his writing, reveals him at first, then, in the spirit of the parts of Pollard's *Shakespeare's Fight with the Pirates* cited at the beginning of this Introduction, tethering his conceptions of theatrical practice to the documents from which he is patiently recovering it. However, as he draws a number of inferences from the *Bonduca* MS (some of which he himself will rightly question later) and as he falls under the influence of Shakespeare textual criticism of the early part of the twentieth century, particularly a pair of McKerrow's essays (at the same time that he occasionally resists such influence), Greg's thinking strays further and further from the evidence of the dramatic MSS, the study of which, he frankly tells us, he left for others to finish (1931, 1:209). As the following chapters detail, his categories of "foul papers" and "promptbook" therefore fail to find support in empirical evidence. Such failure suggests that to be successful in the identification of printer's copy for the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, the reach of editorial inference needs to be considerably more constrained by empirical evidence than it has been in the era of Greg's influence. Such, in any case, is this study's "Conclusion."

NOTES

1. Editors are also obliged to compare the early printed versions to each other, but need to make the comparisons in light of their knowledge of extant dramatic MSS. When editors infer the nature of printer's copy only from comparing printed texts with each other, as R. B. McKerrow, for example, does in his 1935 "Suggestion," their inferences can be seriously wrong, as demonstrated in chapter 3.
2. The first intimation of Pollard's position he published as early as 1909, when he declared that his editorial "Optimism . . . has heard of a prompt-copy in an author's autograph" (vj).
3. Greg, unlike his followers, was particularly irresolute about the nature of "promptbooks" even in his latest writing. While he listed, for example, "loose ends and false starts, and unresolved confusions" among features "characteristic of foul papers" (1955, 142), as opposed to "promptbooks," he immediately allowed that "owing to the casual ways of book-keepers these characteristics may persist, to some extent at least, in the prompt-book" (*ibid.*). However, later reversing himself, he counseled "ignoring the possibility of supineness on the part of the book-keeper . . . if we find distinctive evidence of authorial copy [like "loose ends and false starts, and unresolved confusions"]" (*ibid.*, 175).
4. Because Egan has so recently summarized the post-structuralist critique of New Bibliography (2010, 153–5, 162–5, 190–206), I do not include particular reference to it in this empirical study, but I would note that I attach considerably more value and importance to this critique than he does.

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