

EDITING SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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A BRIEF HISTORY

Shakespeare editing in the twentieth century involves a history of practice, and a history of ideas about the text. The present article will deal with each in turn, recognizing the problematic relation between them. Both were grounded in the work of the New Bibliography, a movement that would determine the direction of Shakespeare textual studies and editing for most of the century. As will become evident, the New Bibliography had lost much of its erstwhile prestige and authority by the end of the century, though the editorial methods it advocated had been subject to development rather than outright rejection. Its inheritance to the twenty-first century currently remains subject to negotiation.

A. W. Pollard's close intellectual companionship with W. W. Greg and R. B. McKerrow formed the first keystone to the movement.¹ Pollard's follower John Dover Wilson soon joined the three. The New Bibliography may be characterized by its mix of commitment to scientific rigour in investigating every aspect of a text's transmission and a sometimes credulous optimism in its project of finding the techniques to identify and eliminate the errors accrued through that process. From its beginnings as a small clique centred on Trinity College, Cambridge it expanded to establish an editorial orthodoxy and to place textual issues firmly on the curriculum for the study of Shakespeare. By the mid-century it had developed beyond its original concern with Shakespeare and early modern literature to offer a set of editorial

principles that it aimed to apply to all canonical works.

Especially in the early years, the achievements of the New Bibliography were monumental. McKerrow's edition of Thomas Nashe, Pollard and G. R. Redgrave's *Short-Title Catalogue*, Greg's *Bibliography of the English Printed Drama*, his studies of the Stationers' Company and of dramatic manuscripts, his general editorship of the Malone Society Reprints series, and later Charlton Hinman's exhaustive study of the printing and proof-correcting of the 1623 First Folio, the Norton facsimile of the first Folio, Marvin Spevack's Concordance, and Peter Blayney's ground-breaking investigation of the printing of the First Quarto (Q1) of *King Lear* are only some of the more conspicuous examples.² All of these supplied material that provided

¹ F. P. Wilson, 'Sir Walter Wilson Greg', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 45 (1959), 307–34.

² Thomas Nashe, *Works*, ed. Ronald B. McKerrow, 5 vols. (London, 1904–10); A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave, *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, and Ireland, and of English Books Printed Abroad, 1475–1640* (London, 1950); W. W. Greg, *A Bibliography of the English Printed Drama to the Restoration*, 4 vols. (London, 1939–59); Greg, *A Companion to Arber: Being a Calendar of Documents in Edward Arber's 'Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London, 1554–1640', With Text and Calendar of Supplementary Documents* (Oxford, 1967); Greg, ed., *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouse: Stage Plots, Actors' Parts, Prompt Books*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1931); Charlton Hinman, ed., *The First Folio of Shakespeare: The Norton Facsimile* (London, New York, Sydney, and Toronto, 1968); Marvin Spevack, *A Complete and Systematic Concordance to the Works of Shakespeare*, 9 vols.

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foundations essential to the textual study of Shakespeare, establishing an invaluable if intimidating edifice of knowledge and resource to confront the aspiring editor.

In contrast, the difficulty in achieving a Shakespeare edition that would meet the criterion of scholarly rigour demanded by the New Bibliography may be measured by the slow progress in the first half of the century towards producing the flagship Oxford complete works. The edition was mooted as early as 1904 and set up under the editorship of R. B. McKerrow in 1929, who died in 1940 leaving the project substantially incomplete; limited further progress was made by his successor Alice Walker. Over the course of the century old-spelling editions of the works of Nashe, Ben Jonson, Thomas Dekker, Christopher Marlowe, Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, George Chapman, and John Webster were all to appear, and some of these remain the standard editions today. But the *desideratum* of an old-spelling complete works of Shakespeare was realised only in the little-known and belated old-spelling version of an editorial project strongly associated with modernization, the revived Oxford Shakespeare of 1986.³

The Arden Shakespeare, initiated at the very end of the nineteenth century with the publication of Edward Dowden's 1899 edition of *Hamlet*, predated the New Bibliographers' turn to original spellings. The delays entailed in producing an edition of the complete works were avoided by this and other series that published one play per volume over a period of time. Arden volumes appeared regularly over thirty years, under the general editorship of W. J. Craig and, later, R. H. Case.⁴ They provided generous commentaries written to meet the needs of the growing body of university and advanced school students.

The earliest major series properly initiated in the new century was the Cambridge University Press New Shakespeare, prepared under the editorship of John Dover Wilson and, in its early years, Arthur Quiller-Couch.⁵ It followed the Arden model of adopting modern spelling. The first three volumes appeared in 1921. From the outset, the main burden

of the practical editing fell on the shoulders of Wilson, who undertook to apply the thinking of the New Bibliography to the text of Shakespeare. His *Manuscript of Shakespeare's 'Hamlet'* was perhaps the most influential and far-going attempt to study printed editions as indirect and imperfect evidence for the manuscript Shakespeare originally wrote.⁶ As an editor, Wilson was inclined to push quasi-scientific speculation informed by inferences about palaeography to its limit, and so to establish a basis for freer emendation than was characteristic of the century's editorial work.

Another distinctive trait of the New Shakespeare was its presentation of stage directions. In the nineteenth century it had become common to find editorial additions to stage directions marked off in square brackets. Wilson turned the procedure on its head: rather than mark off editorial additions, he placed wording from the original texts in quotation marks. The effect was to create, amidst the rigours of New Bibliographical procedure, a place for substantial and significant editorial text in the stage directions that was not differentiated from the text of the quarto or Folio copy. Wilson's practice was to use this space very freely, writing stage directions that sometimes assumed the proscenium arch and sometimes adopted a style of depiction more appropriate to a novel: '*An open place in Rome, before the Capitol, beside the entrance to which there stands the monument of the Andronici. Through a window opening on to the balcony of an upper chamber in the Capitol may be seen the Senate in session.*'⁷

(Hildesheim, 1968–80); Peter W. M. Blayney, *The Texts of 'King Lear' and their Origins*, Vol. 1, *Nicholas Okes and the First Quarto* (Cambridge, 1982).

³ William Shakespeare, *Complete Works*, Original Spelling Edition, gen. ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford, 1986).

⁴ Andrew Murphy, *Shakespeare in Print: A History and Chronology of Shakespeare Publishing* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 207.

⁵ Wilson was later assisted by J. C. Maxwell, G. I. Duthie and Alice Walker.

⁶ John Dover Wilson, *The Manuscript of Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' and the Problems of its Transmission*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1934).

⁷ Cited in Wells, *Re-editing Shakespeare for the Modern Reader* (Oxford, 1984), p. 84, with the laconic comment 'Not too easily, I should have thought'.

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With the exception of Wilson's treatment of stage directions, the Arden and New Shakespeares influenced many subsequent series, some of them still in progress, some of them by design more or less scholarly than others, some prepared by one or two editors and others by a large team. They include the second Arden series (1951–82), Pelican (1957–67), Signet (1963–8), New Penguin (1967–), Oxford (1982–), New Cambridge (1984–), Folger (1992–), and third Arden (1995–). All were in modern spelling and punctuation.

Meanwhile, the decades of the early-to-mid century brought in a number of significant modernised editions of the complete works. W. J. Craig supplemented his work on the Arden series with a complete edition for Oxford University Press in 1911–12. George Lyman Kittredge's 1936 edition for Ginn in Boston endured to be reissued in 1944 as the Viking Portable Shakespeare, which itself was reissued by Penguin in 1977. Two major complete works appeared in 1951; they were edited by Hardin Craig for the American publisher Scott, Foreman and Company, and by Peter Alexander for Collins in Glasgow. The latter remains in print. Hardin Craig's edition became the basis for David Bevington's revision of 1973, which was in turn revised for the Bantam Shakespeare (individual plays and groups of plays, 1988), and for new editions of the complete works under Bevington's sole name (1980, 1992, 1997).

The Craig–Bevington dominance was successfully challenged by G. Blakemore Evans's conservative Riverside for Houghton Mifflin in 1974, which in North America became probably the most widely favoured complete works. A decade later, the Oxford Shakespeare, under the general editorship of Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, established itself as the most innovative edition of the century, offering two separate versions of *King Lear*, and risking what some users felt to be eccentric choices such as its restoration of the original name Oldcastle for the more familiar Falstaff in *1 Henry IV*. The Oxford Shakespeare also stood out for its endorsement of the theatrical dimension of the text, which, as will be seen below, entailed a favourable disposition towards Folio texts that

were thought to be related to theatre playbooks, along with a generous provision of editorial stage directions to clarify the action. With some limited but crucial alterations, including a reversion to Falstaff, the Oxford text was used for the American Norton edition (1997), which gained currency as an alternative to the staid and dependable Riverside for its combination of Oxford textual adventurousism and the critically chic introductions of Stephen Greenblatt and his colleagues.

Despite the pragmatic defeat of the old-spelling ideal, the disparity between the treatment of Shakespeare and of his contemporaries kept the issue visible and subject to periodic debate.⁸ The Riverside edition resisted the full logic of modernisation. Evans offered 'basically a modern-spelling text', but 'an attempt has been made to preserve a selection of Elizabethan spelling forms that reflect, or may reflect, a distinctive contemporary pronunciation'.⁹ Examples include *haberdepois*, *fift*, *wrack*, *bankrout*, *fadom* and *vild*. When Stanley Wells revitalised the defunct Oxford Shakespeare he rejected compromise and, for the first time in editorial history, gave serious attention to the principles and practice of establishing a consistent and thorough-going approach to modernization. He argued that modernization was defensible as the preferred treatment and no mere commercial or populist second-best solution.¹⁰ The practical guidance he offered on the subject became a standard point of reference for editors working for other projects.

The Oxford Shakespeare was, as a project, unusual in that it issued both a complete works (in old and modern spelling) and a fully and separately edited series. It brought together the heavily annotated series, such as the Arden and Cambridge, with the plain-text complete works, exemplified in

⁸ The disparity was more evident in collected works than individual editions, where series of drama such as the Revels, New Mermaid, and Regents Renaissance were modelled on the modernized Shakespeare edition.

⁹ G. Blakemore Evans, ed., *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston and New York, 1974), p. 39.

¹⁰ Stanley Wells, *Modernizing Shakespeare's Spelling*, with Gary Taylor, *Three Studies in the Text of Henry V* (Oxford, 1979); Wells, *Re-Editing Shakespeare*.

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the Alexander text. All these editions were issued by British publishers. In contrast, series such as the Penguin, Pelican and Signet offered annotation on a scale sufficiently contained for them to be brought together as an edition of the complete works. The annotated complete works and slim-line series was more characteristic of American publishers.

If the critical, modernized edition dominated the publishing history of Shakespeare, it was supplemented by less widely circulated editions in less standard formats. The century inherited the New Variorum series, which was revived under the management of the Modern Languages Association and still slowly continues in its gargantuan project of collocating a record of all significant textual variants and commentary. Though the text for the New Variorum is a diplomatic transcript of the First Folio text, this form of editing has not elsewhere been widely favoured. Apologists for the modernized critical edition have long urged that a photofacsimile should be used as a supplement for the purposes of those whose needs are not well served by modernisation and other aspects of editing. Indeed photography, the symptomatic technology of the age of mechanical reproduction, was fully embraced by the New Bibliography. Greg himself made key manuscript materials available in his *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouse* and initiated the Oxford Shakespeare Quartos series of facsimiles. Folio facsimiles were prepared by Sidney Lee (1902), Helge Kökeritz and Charles Tyler Prouty (1955), and Charlton Hinman (1968). The last, founded on Hinman's exhaustive study of the Folger Shakespeare Library's large collection of Folio copies, represented a marked advance on its predecessors. It has been both praised and criticized for presenting a reproduction of the Folio in a form that probably never existed, in which all the pages stand in their corrected state.

Alongside this uneasy rapprochement between movable, emendable text and immutable image of text came, towards the end of the century, an increased awareness of alternative versions and differing possible treatments of them. As computers began to be serviceable in the production of

print editions by way of word processing, collation, concordancing, statistical analysis, text databases, and image storage, they began also to present the possibility of an alternative to the printed edition itself. That alternative could draw on and foster the newly heightened awareness of textuality and textual instability. The most obvious potential of an electronic edition is to offer a hyper-inclusive compendium of all that matters. In practice, in the electronic editions as they began to be planned at the end of the century, design, structure and selectivity became as crucial as in a print edition – though all three criteria were reconstructed in terms tailored to the new medium. It had been recognized that such editions should be produced to high standards of editing. The Internet Shakespeare Editions, the prime example of its kind to have emerged by the end of the century, sets out its general aim 'to make available scholarly editions of high quality in a format native to the medium of the Internet'.¹¹ The series guidelines require a modernized and edited readers' text as the key point of reference, but nevertheless the theoretical issues surrounding the foundations of the text may be less critical in a more permissive electronic environment where there is no single text. The extent to which scholarly electronic editions will transform Shakespeare study remains to be seen, but at the end of the twentieth century its role remained, at most, supplementary to the print edition.

CANON AND COLLABORATION

The account of Shakespeare editions has so far begged important questions about the constitution of 'Shakespeare' as the object of editing. What did Shakespeare write? How are those works to be ordered, and what story does the ordering of them tell? How significant are the works of doubtful authorship? To what extent did Shakespeare collaborate with other dramatists? These are the pragmatic questions. In recent decades the question of attribution has been pursued with vigour, and yet in

¹¹ 'Internet Shakespeare Editions: Aims and Structure', accessed from the project's online homepage at <http://ise.uvic.ca/>.

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uneasy relationship with what has sometimes been called collaboration theory, which has questioned the basic premise of the solitary, autonomous and sovereign author on *a priori* grounds.

Yet for much of the twentieth century the questions just listed played a minor part in their presentation. In 1908 Tucker Brooke edited a collection of *The Shakespeare Apocrypha* which lumped together plays now thought to be probably Shakespeare collaborations, such as *Two Noble Kinsmen* and *Edward III*, with plays with virtually no credible claim to be even partly Shakespearian, such as *Sir John Oldcastle*. Brooke argued against the likelihood of any of the plays in his collection being actually Shakespearian, with the exception of what we now know as the 'Hand D' section of *Sir Thomas More*.¹² For most of the century, the plays Brooke gathered together would remain safely excluded from the canon as it was edited.

The New Bibliographers combined recognition of the theoretical possibility of collaboration with minimisation of the extent to which it applied to Shakespeare. The key moment came in 1924, when E. K. Chambers delivered a withering attack on 'The Disintegration of Shakespeare'.¹³ The disintegrators in question were the throng of critics who had made an intellectual hobby of identifying in the canonical works the hands of other dramatists. Considering the irresponsibly impressionistic approach of the school that Chambers attacked, his admonitions were timely. But they drove the question of Shakespeare as a collaborator into the shadow for half a century. S. Schoenbaum's insistence on rigour in attribution study reinforced the view of Shakespeare as a non-collaborator for another generation.¹⁴ The 1951 Alexander complete works is typical of the representation of the canon as it stood at mid century. Alexander followed the content and order of the Folio, adding one play, *Pericles*, which is now understood to be a collaboration with George Wilkins, and the non-dramatic poems. An appendix included a transcript of the Hand D passage in *Sir Thomas More*.

Despite some false starts such as the attribution of 'A Funeral Elegy' to Shakespeare,¹⁵ despite the strictures of collaboration theorists who have

misleadingly insisted on an inevitable association between attribution scholarship and the post-Enlightenment ideology of the solitary author,¹⁶ and in contrast with areas of textual study discussed below in which the past two decades have seen increasing scepticism, in the past twenty years attribution study has developed increasingly sophisticated techniques that have led to a more precise understanding of what and how Shakespeare wrote. The Oxford Shakespeare was the first complete works to advance the provocative claims that Shakespeare probably collaborated with Thomas Middleton on *Timon of Athens*, that Middleton adapted *Measure for Measure* as well as *Macbeth*,¹⁷ and that Shakespeare wrote less than half of *1 Henry VI*.¹⁸ Since 1986, Shakespeare's complete authorship of *Titus Andronicus* has been widely rejected in view of the impressive cogency of the case for George Peele's hand in the play.¹⁹ Of *Edward III*,

¹² 'It seems improbable, then, for many reasons, that Shakespeare had an interest in the original construction of any of the doubtful plays': C. F. Tucker Brooke, ed., *The Shakespeare Apocrypha: Being a Collection of Fourteen Plays which have been Ascribed to Shakespeare* (Oxford, 1908), p. xii. Brooke's collection included *Arden of Faversham*, *Edward III* and *Two Noble Kinsmen*, but not *Pericles*, which he accepted as Shakespearian.

¹³ E. K. Chambers, 'The Disintegration of Shakespeare', British Academy Annual Shakespeare Lecture 1924, in Lascelles Abercrombie *et al.*, *Aspects of Shakespeare* (Oxford, 1933), pp. 23–48.

¹⁴ S. Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare and Others* (Washington, DC, 1984).

¹⁵ The poem was printed in the Norton and revised Riverside and Bevington editions, all issued in 1997. The attribution to Shakespeare is decisively refuted in Brian Vickers, *Counterfeiting Shakespeare: Evidence, Authorship, and John Ford's Funerall Elegy* (Cambridge, 2002).

¹⁶ See especially Jeffrey Masten, *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge, 1997).

¹⁷ As argued in Gary Taylor and John Jowett, *Shakespeare Reshaped, 1603–1623* (Oxford, 1993).

¹⁸ As elaborated in Gary Taylor, 'Shakespeare and Others: The Authorship of *1 Henry VI*', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 7 (1995), 145–205.

¹⁹ The arguments for Peele's hand are digested and developed in Brian Vickers, *Shakespeare, Co-author: A Historical Study of Five Collaborative Plays* (Oxford, 2002).

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the Oxford editors wrote, ‘if we had attempted a thorough reinvestigation of candidates for inclusion in the early dramatic canon’, it would have begun with that play (*Textual Companion*, p. 137). The play was subsequently published in the New Cambridge series,²⁰ and is included as a collaboration in the 2005 Second Edition of the Oxford *Complete Works*. Recent work, as yet unpublished, suggests that *Arden of Faversham* may be at least partly by Shakespeare.²¹ We can now see that the catalogue of plays written in collaboration is longer than is usually recognized (and may yet grow longer still); it includes *Edward III*, *1 Henry VI*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Sir Thomas More*, *Timon of Athens*, *Pericles*, *Henry VIII*, *Two Noble Kinsmen*, the lost play *Cardenio*, and perhaps *Arden of Faversham*.²² *Sir Thomas More* was recognized for most of the century as a play in which Shakespeare collaborated on the revision. It was rarely printed in full in Shakespeare editions,²³ but the case for doing so increased as the picture filled out of Shakespeare’s other collaborative work. Attribution scholarship was and is redefining what is meant by ‘Shakespeare’ in ways that affect both editorial theory and the wider critical imagination.

LOCALIZING BADNESS

Just as, in the earlier twentieth century, plays were divided firmly between the canonical and the Apocryphal, with little acceptance of the intermediate concept of collaboration, so texts were divided between the camps of good and bad. In both respects, the work of the later century sought to replace these dichotomies.

The intellectual background to the century’s editorial work on Shakespeare was determined by the publications of Pollard on the classification of texts.²⁴ Previous textual critics had developed some sense that the quartos varied in character, and indeed the suggestion that the First Quartos of *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* might derive from memorial reconstruction by actors goes back to Tycho Mommsen in 1857. The work of P. A. Daniel anticipated later developments by confirming a number of individual quartos as particularly corrupt. Pollard transformed the field of study

by generating an overall hypothesis as to textual origins.

Pollard’s most crucial intervention came in the chapter in his *Shakespeare Folios and Quartos* headed ‘The Good and Bad Quartos’ (pp. 64–80). Investigating the regulation of entitlement to publication as evidenced in the Stationers’ Register, he noted a high level of correspondence between textual ‘goodness’ and regular, authorised publication. One criterion of textual virtue was the implied verdict of the Folio editors in accepting printed copy; Pollard also took into account the quality of the text on its own terms. The criterion for authorised publication was regular entry in the Stationers’ Register. As Greg later summarized,

The novel feature in Pollard’s argument was the demonstration that the issue of each of these five ‘bad’ quartos was in some way peculiar: *Romeo and Juliet* and *Henry V* were not entered in the Stationers’ Register at all; *Hamlet* and *Pericles* were published by stationers other than those who had made the entrance; *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was entered by one stationer and transferred to another the same day.²⁵

Pollard interpreted the ‘conditional’ entry in the Stationers’ Register of 1598 prohibiting the printing of *Merchant of Venice* without licence from the

²⁰ *King Edward III*, ed. Giorgio Melchiori (Cambridge, 1998).

²¹ I am grateful to MacD. P. Jackson for sending me a copy of his persuasive paper ‘Shakespeare and the Quarrel Scene in *Arden of Faversham*’ (forthcoming) in advance of publication.

²² For overviews, see MacD. P. Jackson, *Studies in Attribution: Middleton and Shakespeare* (Salzburg, 1979); Gary Taylor, ‘The Canon and Chronology of Shakespeare’s Plays’, in Stanley Wells and Taylor, with John Jowett and William Montgomery, *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion* (Oxford, 1987; subsequently *Textual Companion*), pp. 69–144; Jonathan Hope, *The Authorship of Shakespeare’s Plays* (Cambridge, 1994); Richard Proudfoot, *Shakespeare: Text, Stage, and Canon* (London, 2001); and Brian Vickers, *Co-Author*.

²³ An exception is Harold Jenkins’s text in Charles Jasper Sisson’s edition of the *Complete Works* (London, 1954).

²⁴ Alfred W. Pollard, *Shakespeare Folios and Quartos: A Study in the Bibliography of Shakespeare’s Plays 1594–1685* (London, 1909); *Shakespeare’s Fight with the Pirates and the Problems of the Transmission of his Text* (Cambridge, 1920).

²⁵ W. W. Greg, *The Editorial Problem in Shakespeare* (Oxford, 1942; revised edn, 1954), p. 10.

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Lord Chamberlain, and the puzzling orders of 1600 whereby four Shakespeare plays were entered as ‘to be staied’, as the Chamberlain’s Men’s mainly successful attempts to block unauthorized publication (pp. 66–7). They indicated, therefore, that Shakespeare and his company were doing battle with ‘pirates’ who sought to steal their plays and publish them surreptitiously. Pollard shifted the taxonomy of the text of Shakespeare, which had been suspicious of the quartos as a whole, by disclosing that the majority of quartos were free of this taint of badness. Corruption could be limited to the texts that were irregularly printed and were later rejected by the Folio editors.

Pollard had worked in close collaboration with W. W. Greg. In his preface he confessed, ‘In some sections of this study Mr Greg and I have been fellow-hunters, communicating our results to each other at every stage’ (p. vi). Greg was to publish both his own note on the *Hamlet* quartos and an old-spelling edition of *Merry Wives* in 1910.²⁶ Where Pollard’s book had focused on the publishing context, Greg’s edition of *Merry Wives* was a ground-breaking and detailed textual study in which he identified the actor of the Host of the Garter as the person who had reported and assembled the quarto text. Greg’s work in turn stimulated a number of other detailed studies published in the early decades of the century in which the case for memorial transmission was developed in relation to individual quarto texts. Thus Q1 *Hamlet*, *Henry V*, and *Romeo and Juliet* were identified as ‘bad’ quartos, as were the first editions of *2 Henry VI* and *3 Henry VI*.²⁷ Critics who saw *The Taming of the Shrew* as first issued under the title *The Taming of A Shrew* placed *A Shrew* under the same general heading, though *A Shrew* was more usually regarded as an independent non-Shakespearean version rather than a memorial reconstruction.²⁸ *Pericles* also joined the group of ‘bad’ quartos, despite being recognised as a text that was complicated yet further by the issue of joint authorship.²⁹

The significance of memorial reconstruction was two-fold. First, it enabled the affected texts to be labelled as ‘bad’ (though the nature of that badness

could never quite be declared homogeneous) and assigned a marginal position in the editing of the plays in question. Second, it sustained the narrative of piracy by aligning the irregular circumstances of publication noted by Pollard with an activity on the part of actors that could readily be interpreted as theft. But by 1942, when Greg published *The Editorial Problem in Shakespeare*, this apparently strong convergence of textual analysis and book history had begun to look vulnerable. Greg pointed out the limits of the evidence of the Stationers’ Register:

absence of registration is not in itself evidence of piracy nor always accompanied by textual corruption; nor is simultaneous entrance and transfer proof of dishonest dealing . . . On the other hand, some pieces that were quite regularly entered prove to have thoroughly bad texts.³⁰

The suspected texts now included the quartos of *King Lear* and *Richard III*. Both had been regularly entered in the Register and, though subjected to heavy annotation, were to be accepted as the foundations for the Folio texts. But both had nevertheless now emerged as ‘presumably piratical and surreptitious’ (p. 13).

A problem Greg recognized as early as his study of *Merry Wives* was that the effects of bad reporting

²⁶ W. W. Greg, ‘The *Hamlet* Quartos, 1603, 1604’, *MLR* 5 (1910), 196–7; Greg, ed., *Shakespeare’s ‘Merry Wives of Windsor’ 1602* (London, 1906).

²⁷ George Ian Duthie, *The ‘Bad’ Quarto of ‘Hamlet’: A Critical Study* (Cambridge, 1941); Alfred Hart, *Stolne and Surreptitious Copies* (Melbourne, 1942); Harry Reno Hoppe, *The Bad Quarto of ‘Romeo and Juliet’* (Ithaca, 1948); Peter Alexander, ‘II *Henry VI* and the Copy for *The Contention* (1594)’, *TLS*, 9 October 1924, 629–30; Alexander, ‘3 *Henry VI* and *Richard Duke of York*’, *TLS*, 13 November 1924, 730.

²⁸ Peter Alexander, ‘*The Taming of a Shrew*’, *TLS*, 16 September 1926, 614.

²⁹ Greg, *Editorial Problem*, pp. 72–6. In this chapter I retain the term “‘bad’ Quartos”, both apologetically in the absence of a more satisfactory label and unapologetically as an historical designation.

³⁰ Greg, *Editorial Problem*, pp. 11–12. On the significance of entry in the Stationers’ Register, see also Peter W. M. Blayney, ‘The Publication of Playbooks’, in *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York, 1997), 383–422.

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cannot always be distinguished from those of adaptation. Shortening of a text, for instance, can be an effect of adaptation rather than bad memory. The instability of the boundary between the effects of memory and the effects of adaptation persistently plagued accounts of the ‘bad’ quartos, as did the difficulty in making all the textual data conform to any detailed fleshing-out of the hypothesis. But Greg and others were nevertheless able to argue persuasively that if textual shortening is produced not by cutting but by rough, unShakespearian, and sometimes garbled paraphrase, and if the metricality of verse is sometimes severely damaged in the process, it is hard to see how a redactor working from a manuscript could produce such a text, and an effect of the limitations of memory is evidently manifested.

In the mid twentieth century this hypothesis of memorial reconstruction was tested against alternative postulates. A number of critics suggested that the affected quartos were put together from shorthand scripts taken by members of the theatre audience. This view is now generally discounted on the basis that early modern shorthand systems were inadequate to the task.³¹ Another explanation is that they represent early authorial versions that were later filled out to become the plays we know from the longer quartos and Folio.³² This view did not gain wide acceptance, not least on account of features of language and metre, some of them quantifiable, that have been shown to lie outside the range of Shakespeare’s style at any point in his writing.³³ Moreover, the early draft hypothesis acutely conflicts with the signs of theatrical adaptation that numerous critics have observed as marking these as late texts in the process of transmission.

Towards the end of the century Kathleen O. Irace was able to confirm, for some texts more clearly than others, that the suspected reconstructions show a pattern of varying correspondence with their longer counterparts first noted by Greg.³⁴ She produced a statistical analysis showing that where the actor was on stage, his part was relatively well transmitted, and the parts of other actors were transmitted with intermediate reliability; the

least accurate parts of the text were those where the actor or actors were offstage. The demonstration was more convincing for some texts than others. *Merry Wives* was a particularly clear example. Here the hypothesis of memorial reconstruction was immensely strengthened, for it is hard to think of any alternative way to account for the phenomenon.

The spirit of the 1990s was, however, hostile to the New Bibliography, to its polarization of ‘good’ and ‘bad’, and to its optimistic drive to make the convoluted transmission of the text knowable. Paul Werstine’s sharp, cynical critiques set the tone, and proclaimed, unignorably, that the days of the New Bibliography were over.³⁵ Memorial reconstruction became a key instance in the crisis in theory and methodology, as the point where the work of the New Bibliographers was least empirical and so the Achilles’ heel of the whole movement.

Where Werstine addressed the historical evolution of editorial theory, Laurie E. Maguire investigated the texts themselves, taking on board non-Shakespearian examples as well as the Shakespearian ‘bad’ quartos.³⁶ By excluding the standard analytic method of comparing the suspect text with its longer counterpart, and by carefully investigating the demonstrable effects of memory on textual transmission rather than making assumptions about it, Maguire established a more rigorous and

³¹ Duthie, *The ‘Bad’ Quarto of ‘Hamlet’*, pp. 12–18.

³² Hardin Craig, *A New Look at Shakespeare’s Quartos* (Stanford, 1961). The view is espoused in numerous articles by Steven Urkowitz.

³³ Gary Taylor, in *Textual Companion*, pp. 84–6.

³⁴ Kathleen O. Irace, *Reforming the ‘Bad’ Quartos: Performance and Provenance of Six Shakespearean First Editions* (Cranbury, London, and Mississauga, 1994).

³⁵ See especially ‘McKerrow’s “Suggestion” and Twentieth-Century Shakespeare Textual Criticism’, *Renaissance Drama*, n.s. 19 (1988), 149–73; ‘Narratives about Printed Shakespeare Texts: “Foul Papers” and “Bad” Quartos’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 41 (1990), 65–86; ‘A Century of “Bad” Shakespeare Quartos’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 50 (1999), 310–33; ‘Post-Theory Problems in Shakespeare Editing’, *Yearbook of English Studies*, 29 (1999), 103–17.

³⁶ Laurie E. Maguire, *Shakespearean Suspect Texts: The ‘Bad’ Quartos and their Contexts* (Cambridge, 1996).

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narrowed approach to the question than other investigators. She did not allow herself, for instance, to explore the kind of analysis conducted at the same time by Irace. It is perhaps not surprising that their conclusions differed. Maguire found very few probable or possible cases of memorial reconstruction – though, given her self-imposed limitations and the scepticism that characterised the period, it is significant that *Merry Wives* still emerged as a ‘probable’ memorial reconstruction (p. 286), and Q1 *Hamlet* as a ‘possible’ one (p. 256). If her work offered a strong critique of memorial reconstruction as a general explanation for the ‘bad’ Quarto, the hypothesis survives her rigorous approach at least in vestigial form.

The ‘bad’ quartos were emerging in the 1990s as distinctive more by virtue of adaptation than corruption. Every text was opened up for study and potential or actual performance without prejudice as a version in its own right.³⁷ As the century closed, the present writer’s edition of *Richard III* and Stanley Wells’s *King Lear* for the Oxford series took the erstwhile ‘doubtful’ quartos as the primary text of choice.³⁸ But even in this environment memorial reconstruction could not be banished. It continued to offer a compelling if problematic and partial explanation for a number of texts displaying distinctly unShakespearean features that had not been adequately explained by other theories.

AUTHOR AND THEATRE

In Greg’s consolidation of New Bibliographical thought in 1942, Pollard’s explanation of the ‘good’ quartos was also looking as unsatisfactory as his account of the ‘bad’. Pollard had developed his earlier work on the text of Shakespeare in the Sanders lectures given at Cambridge University in 1915. Reading at face value Shakespeare’s co-actors John Heminges and Henry Condell’s claim in the preliminaries to the First Folio that ‘wee haue scarce receiued from him a blot on his papers’ at face value, he had argued that the manuscripts that became the printers’ copy for F were Shakespeare’s original drafts (*Fight*, p. 60). These had probably been submitted for licence to the Master of the Revels

and adapted for use in the theatre as a promptbook (pp. 63–4). The same explanation was extended to the ‘good’ quartos. The players would be prepared to surrender their promptbook to the printers for a few weeks for ‘the superior convenience of a printed prompt-copy’ (p. 66).

Greg forcefully questioned several of Pollard’s premises. Here the manuscript of *Sir Thomas More* became significant. A 1923 collection of essays edited by Pollard with major contributions from Greg advanced the case that Hand D was Shakespeare’s.³⁹ Hand D’s writing habits did not correspond with the account given by the Folio editors of Shakespeare’s blot-free papers. ‘Recent criticism’, Greg notes, ‘is inclined to discount their statement’ (*Editorial Problem*, p. 29). Ironically, Pollard’s project on *Sir Thomas More* had undermined his earlier work on the quartos.

Greg went on to draw a distinction, based on his study of other surviving dramatic manuscripts of the period, between ‘foul papers’ and ‘fair copy’. This latter might be prepared by either the dramatist (or one of them in a collaboration) or a professional scribe. For Greg, the signs of textual cleanness combined with annotation for theatrical use are typical of Folio plays printed from manuscript, or with reference to manuscript. The ‘good’ quartos, in contrast, display features that suggest Shakespeare’s rough draft, or ‘foul papers’, such as difficulties resulting from hasty handwriting, undeleted first sketches of a phrase or passage that stood alongside its replacement, misplaced interlinear or marginal insertions, inconsistent forms and abbreviations of speech-prefix, and imaginatively descriptive but theatrically redundant wording in stage directions. When the company relinquished a manuscript

³⁷ As witnessed by the New Cambridge Early Quartos series, and readings of ‘bad’ quartos such as in Leah Marcus, *Unediting the Renaissance: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Milton* (London, 1996).

³⁸ *The Tragedy of King Richard III*, ed. John Jowett (Oxford, 2000); *The History of King Lear*, ed. Stanley Wells (Oxford, 2000).

³⁹ Alfred W. Pollard, ed., *Shakespeare’s Hand in the Play of Sir Thomas More, with the Text of the Ill May Day Scenes* (Cambridge, 1923).

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for publication during Shakespeare's lifetime, they would have retained the licensed promptbook and sent the back-up document instead (*Editorial Problem*, p. 33, p. 107).

Greg's account of 'foul papers' split up Pollard's large group of reliable texts, differentiating between the typical 'good' quarto and typical Folio texts. It posited a correspondence, first suggested by McKerrow, between signs of inconsistency and irregularity found in the 'good' quartos such as *Love's Labour's Lost*, Q2 *Romeo and Juliet*, *Merchant of Venice*, 1 *Henry IV*, and *Much Ado* with similar signs in manuscript authorial drafts.⁴⁰ This enabled Greg to claim that, despite the difficulties in Pollard's argument, the grounds for optimism as regards the 'good' quartos were actually stronger than he had realized, as they were especially close to an authorial draft (*Editorial Problem*, pp. 95–7).

The term 'foul papers' was borrowed from its use to describe various kinds of rough draft in the early modern period and elevated to mean the dramatist's complete draft as a standard category in the description of dramatic manuscripts. Greg's difficulty was that no extant manuscript fully conforms to the description. Nevertheless, it is self-evident that any 'fair copy' had an antecedent of some form, that any transcript is a copy of something else. The passages written by the dramatists identified as Henry Chettle, Thomas Heywood, Shakespeare and Thomas Dekker in *Sir Thomas More* and the entirety of a manuscript such as *The Captives* correspond in many ways with Greg's description of foul papers – except insofar as some of them have been lightly annotated by a theatrical scribe, the *Sir Thomas More*, additions do not make up a complete draft, and Greg himself commented that *The Captives* does not show much authorial alteration (*Folio*, p. 108).

These exceptions proved concerning to more recent critics such as Werstine who have demanded that early modern play production must fall within processes that generate fixed categories of manuscript if the analysis of Greg and others is to have any utility. Greg himself indeed sought to classify play texts, yet he consistently showed awareness of the limits of categorization and recognized

that each individual text displayed unique characteristics that were likely to place it in ambiguous relationship with the category to which it putatively belonged. In addition to the theatre-oriented manuscripts, Greg recognized another type, the 'literary' transcript prepared for a private reader such as a patron. He referred to dramatic manuscripts (specifically those used as Folio copy) as 'a misty mid region of Weir, a land of shadowy shapes and melting outlines, where not even the most patient inquiry and the most penetrating analysis can hope to arrive at any but tentative and proximate conclusions'.⁴¹ This statement reflects his awareness of the diversity of feature in the extant dramatic manuscripts, as well as the complexities of transmission to print.

Mistiness notwithstanding, for Greg the foul papers and the transcript of them that became the promptbook were the two key documents in the composition and preparation of the play for the theatre. Both would normally be held by the theatre company. In Fredson Bowers's influential development of Greg's work the number of categories swelled to thirteen. Bowers both extended and codified the diversity that was already acknowledged in, and yet partly occluded by, Greg's simpler system made up of the binaries foul and fair, theatrical and literary, authorial and scribal.⁴² As Bowers pointed out, in Robert Dabourne's letter to Philip Henslowe in which he refers to 'the foule sheet', Dabourne indicates that the company would pay him only for 'ye fayr' that he was copying out when Henslowe's man called on him (p. 15). If the foul papers would often not have been accepted by the company, this would partly explain why the survival of 'foul papers' is so rare. At the risk of assuming a wasteful use of resource in multiple

⁴⁰ R. B. McKerrow, 'The Elizabethan Printer and Dramatic Manuscripts', *Library*, IV, 12 (1931–2), 253–75; McKerrow, 'A Suggestion Regarding Shakespeare's Manuscripts', *Review of English Studies*, 11 (1935), 459–65.

⁴¹ W. W. Greg, *The Shakespeare First Folio: Its Bibliographical and Textual History* (Oxford, 1955), p. 103.

⁴² Fredson Bowers, *On Editing Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Dramatists* (Philadelphia, 1955), pp. 11–12.