Introduction

'Lear.   How, nothing can come of nothing, speake againe.'[1]

EDITING BEFORE THE BEGINNING OF EDITING[2]

The publication of *The works of Mr. William Shakespear; in six volumes . . . Revis'd and corrected, with an account of the life and writings of the author. By N. Rowe, Esq* (1709) marked the official beginning of a long and influential editorial tradition. The unprecedented appearance of the name of the editor alongside the name of the author on the title page of a printed collection of English plays signalled the rise of a self-conscious proprietary stance towards the dramatic text: whereas seventeenth-century readers had been encouraged to buy *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies. Published according to the True Originall Copies* in the four Folio editions of 1623, 1632, 1663–4, and 1685, readers willing to invest in the new collected edition of Shakespeare's works in 1709 were duly informed that what they were purchasing was Nicholas Rowe's 'Shakespeare'. Rather than an authorizing point of origin, the name of the author was now associated with a material body of works owned by the Tonsons publishing cartel throughout the best part of the eighteenth century. While 'Shakespeare' remained under the control of these 'grand possessors', a long line of editors was commissioned to prepare their own versions of Shakespeare's texts, which unfailingly challenged and claimed to supersede their immediate predecessors. Several studies have charted the development of eighteenth-century editorial theories and practices[3] and have reinforced the assumption that 1709 represented a genuine starting point, before which Shakespeare's texts had gradually deteriorated through the accumulation of accidental corruption in the printing house. The purpose of this book is to challenge this evolutionary understanding of the transmission of 'Shakespeare' in print. While acknowledging 1709 as a

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crucial watershed in the editorial tradition, this book shows that the conscious editorial manipulation of Shakespeare's dramatic texts had started well before Nicholas Rowe's edition, albeit informed by radically different views about what constituted an 'authoritative' text. What is significant is the *discontinuity*, rather than the *absence*, of editorial practices between the rise of Shakespeare in print and Rowe's edition of 1709.

Instances of editorial intervention in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century editions of Shakespeare have not gone completely unnoticed. However, the general tendency has been to focus on exceptional examples which can best be understood as precursors of the editorial tradition associated with eighteenth-century editors. For example, conjectural emendations in the Douai Manuscript (1694–5, Douai Public Library MS 7.87), which includes transcripts of *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth*, were described by G. Blakemore Evans as 'show[ing] considerable intelligence in dealing with corrupt or difficult passages' (1962: 165). Rather than regarding these emendations as representative of late seventeenth-century editorial practices, Blakemore Evans understood them as 'readings which . . . anticipate the emendations proposed by the later eighteenth- and nineteenth-century editors of Shakespeare' (1962: 166). Similarly, having established what categories of variants in the First Folio of 1623 can be ascribed to Ralph Crane, scrivener to the King's Men in the late 1610s and early 1620s, T. H. Howard-Hill concluded that '[Crane's] involvement with the First Folio was so extensive and of such a kind that it is [he] rather than the playwright Nicholas Rowe whom we should acknowledge as the first person to confront the problems of translating Shakespeare's plays from stage to the study' (1992: 129). Several scholars have also noted how some seventeenth-century editions of Shakespeare drew on earlier editions to supplement the shortcomings of their source-text. Thomas L. Berger, for example, regards the 1630 Quarto edition of *Othello* as 'the first "conflated" text of [the play], probably the first consistently conflated text of any Shakespearian play' (1988: 145). More controversially, Jonathan Goldberg has argued that while the First Quarto of *Romeo and Juliet* reflects a theatrical version of the play, the Second Quarto may not be closer to the fuller version of the play as intended by its author but the product of editorial conflation of the First Quarto and a manuscript preserving authorial and non-authorial 'second thoughts and alternatives' (1994: 187).[4] While essential in advancing our understanding of the variety of editorial intervention which contributed to the rise of Shakespeare in print before 1709, these studies are informed by a teleological desire which

foregrounds familiar (and therefore *properly* editorial) strategies at the expense of the much wider and more representative textual practices explored in this book.

'MAKING PERFECT': OR, EDITORIAL PRACTICES BEFORE 1709

The editorial tradition ushered in by Rowe at the beginning of the eighteenth century did not rise out of a textual and bibliographical vacuum. In her study on the interrelation between theatrical and print cultures, Julie Stone Peters has helpfully stressed that editorial strategies for the correction of vernacular drama were not unknown in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and that the invention of the movable type modified pre-existing methods of editorial intervention devised for the transmission of manuscript texts during the medieval period. More specifically, Peters has identified a link between the opportunities offered by the new technology and the desirability of new standards of textual accuracy: 'print was driven by the scholarly need for well-edited texts; editing was driven by the commercial possibilities the press provided' (2000: 131). The need for well edited texts extended to classical drama, which was made newly available in scholarly editions by Continental editors and publishers. In turn, as Peters continues, '[f]rom their work and the general culture of textual production, principles of textual editing (or at least its claims) filtered into ordinary dramatic publication' (2000: 131). It is well known that such claims became increasingly common on the title pages of English printed playbooks, which often boast of being 'newly corrected and amended'. However, whether such claims represent a mere marketing ploy which gestured towards Continental editorial practices or whether they generally suggest a genuine attempt to correct the text remains largely to be established. Even more importantly, no systematic study has so far identified the principles which informed the intervention of early modern correctors who prepared dramatic copy for the press.

A systematic study of editorial practices in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has traditionally been hindered by a drastic lack of documentary evidence. A recent survey of extant manuscript and printed texts used in the printing house to set up known editions of early modern books includes no dramatic titles (Moore 1992).[5] However, the lack of documentary evidence showing the extent to which dramatic copy may have been annotated in preparation for the press should not by itself rule out the occurrence of such practice. Circumstantial evidence suggests that

annotation of manuscript or printed dramatic copy prior to its trans-
mission into print was in fact far from uncommon and that it was generally
valued as a good selling point by early modern publishers.[6] The most
explicit reference to this practice occurs in the stationers' address to the
reader in the second edition of Beaumont and Fletcher's *Comedies and
Tragedies* (Wing B1582, 1679):

Courteous Reader, THE First Edition of these Plays in this Volume having found
that Acceptance as to give us Encouragement to make a Second Impression, we
were very desirous they might come forth as Correct as might be. And we were very
opportunely informed of a Copy which an ingenious and worthy Gentleman had
taken the pains (or rather the pleasure) to read over; wherein he had all along
Corrected several faults (some very gross) which had crept in by the frequent
imprinting of them. His Corrections were the more to be valued, because he had
an intimacy with both our Authors, and had been a Spectator of most of them
when they were Acted in their life-time. This therefore we resolved to purchase at
any Rate; and accordingly with no small cost obtain'd it. (A1 5–16)

According to Fredson Bowers, this unusually detailed account of the origin
of the corrections introduced in the second edition of Beaumont and
Fletcher's *Comedies and Tragedies* is corroborated by the fact that some of
its variants seem to stem from 'educated guesses' rather than from con-
sultation of a different textual witness unknown to us (Bowers 1966–96: III
242). Also of special interest in this passage are the publishers' willingness to
invest in an annotated copy of the First Folio of 1647 and their decision to
advertise the origin of such copy to attract prospective readers.

Dedications and addresses to the reader prefaced to early modern
printed playbooks confirm that the annotation of the printer's copy for
the press was widely recognized as a desirable practice. Sir Aston Cokayne,
for example, tells his readers about his efforts to prevent the impression of
his *Trappolin Suppos'd a Prince* from a defective copy, after failing to stop
an incomplete version of his earlier play, *The Obstinate Lady*, from reaching
the press:

I was fearful my *Trappolin*, and other Poems should have run the like mis-
fortune; and therefore made a diligent enquiry after them, and when I had
found them out could not get them delivered without parting with some
money, and promising my honest friend Mr. *W. Godbid* (after I had afforded
them some small correction) I would bestow them on him, (with my consent) for
the Press. (Wing C4898, 1658, A3v 18–20, A4r 1–10)

Authors were not the only party with an interest in advertising the origin of
the printer's copy. Publishers of playbooks were similarly anxious to vouch

for its quality and were far more likely to blame printers than authors for the shortcomings of the printed text which was set from it. A good example of this type of allusion to the printer's copy can be found in a 'Postscript' to *Comedies, Tragi-Comedies, With other Poems, by Mr William Cartwright*, where the publisher Humphrey Moseley stresses that '[t]he Printer's faults (such as they are) must lye at his own door; for the written Coppy was very exact' (Wing C709, 1651, 4*6 18–20).

The practice of annotating a manuscript or printed copy for the press was not only common but also distinctive enough to warrant the use of specific terminology to distinguish it from other editorial activities. If starting from the beginning of the nineteenth century the verb 'to perfect' was used specifically in typography to mean 'to complete the printing of a sheet of a book, etc. by printing the second side' (*OED* v.1.b), in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it meant both 'to bring to completion' (*OED*, v.1.a) and 'to make perfect or faultless' (*OED* v.3), and was often used to indicate the process of getting a manuscript or printed text ready for its (re)transmission into print.

The paratextual materials prefaced to early modern dramatic and non-dramatic printed books provide examples of both usages. In 1590, a publisher's address in Henry Smith's *A Sermon of the benefite of Contentation. . . . Taken by Characterie* (STC 22693) confirms that the printer's copy had reached the press without the author's permission, the word 'characterie' in the title indicating one of the most popular methods of stenography regularly used at the end of the sixteenth century to transcribe sermons as they were preached. A year later Smith revised and fleshed out the version preserved in the 1590 edition. In his address to the reader he conveniently specifies that his revision consisted both in perfecting the matter, that is in providing passages that had been accidentally omitted in the first edition, and in correcting typographical errors: 'HEaring how fast this Sermon hath uttered, and yet howe misarablye it hath bin abused in Printing, as it were with whole lims cut off at once, and cleane left out, I haue taken a little paines (as my sicknesse gaue me leaue) both to perfit the matter, and to correct the print' (STC 22696.5, 1591, A2r 2–14). Similarly, Nicholas Ling, the publisher who compiled and edited several collections of aphorisms, common-places and proverbs, including *Politeuphuia* (STC 15685, 1597), addresses his dedicatee by proudly announcing that 'what you seriously began long since, and haue alwaies beene very careful for the full perfection of, at length thus finished, . . . I present you with' (A2r, 5–11). If these two examples show how the verb 'to perfect' was currently used to mean 'to complete, to finish', other examples indicate that the same verb

was also used to mean 'to correct, to make perfect or faultless' and was applied specifically to the preparation of the printer's copy for the press. Theophilus Lavender, the compiler of *The Trauels of foure English men and preacher into Africa . . .* (STC 3052, 1612), specifically distinguishes desirable additions from the perfecting of errors, thus reversing the distinction set up by Henry Smith in the revised edition of his *The Benefite of Contentation*: 'the publishing hereof without the Authors consent, may perhaps be an inducement vnto him to enlarge this discourse, by adding thereunto the diuersities of Religions in those Countries, . . . and by perfiting any thing which herein shall be thought imperfect' (B2r 18–24).

Allusions to the 'perfection' of the printer's copy can also be found in early modern printed playbooks. Sometimes the verb 'to perfect' is used ambiguously, and it is impossible to gather from the context whether it is used to mean 'to complete' or 'to correct'. George Chapman, for example, having reassured the dedicatee of his *The Widow's Tears, A Comedy* (STC 4994, 1612) that '[o]ther Countrie men haue thought the like [that is, playbooks] worthie of Dukes and Princes acceptations', promises to 'select, and perfect, out of my other Studies, that may better expresse me' (A2r 8–10, 20–1). In this instance, 'to perfect' could mean either 'to finish' or 'to correct'. Fortunately, other early modern dramatic paratexts are far more explicit when it comes to describing the process whereby the printer's copy was prepared for the press. In 1576, the printer and publisher Richard Jones prefaced his edition of *The Princelye Pleasures, at the Courte at Kenelwoorth*[7] with an address to the reader where the phrase 'perfect Copies' clearly means 'complete':

I thought meete to trye by all meanes possible if I might recouer the true Copies of the same [that is, the entertainment at Kenilworth], to gratifye all suche as had requyred them at my handes, or might hereafter bee styrred with the lyke desire. And in fine I haue with much trauayle and paine obtained the very true and perfect Copies, *of all that were there presented*. (my emphasis, Greg 1939–59: 1195)

In Whetstone's *Promos and Cassandra* (STC 25347, 1578), also printed and published by Richard Jones two years later, both author and publisher refer to the preparation of the manuscript copy of this play for the press. In his dedicatory epistle, George Whetstone uses the adjective 'vnperfect' to explain how his personal circumstances prevented him from correcting the text of this comedy before it was handed over to Jones:

SYr, . . . of late I perused diuers of my vnperfect workes, fully minded to bestowe on you, the trauell of some of my forepassed time. But (resolued to accompanye, the aduenturous Captaine, Syr *Humphrey Gylbert*, in his honorable voiadge,) I found my leysure too littel, to correct the errors of my sayd workes. So that

(inforced) I lefte them disparsed, amonge my learned freendes, at theyr leasure, to
polish, if I faild to returne. (A2r 5–16)

Whetstone makes clear that the process of transferring a manuscript work
into print involved a specific stage during which an 'vnperfect' work was
'polished' and corrected. Richard Jones added an address to the reader,
which reinforces the impression that both authors and publishers regarded
a manuscript copy as deficient, if the author had been unable to perfect it:

GEntle Reader, this labour of Maister Whetstons, came into my handes, in his
fyrst coppy, whose leasure was so lyttle (being then readie to depart his country)
that he had no time to worke it a new, nor to geue apt instructions, to prynte so
difficult a worke, beyng full of variety, both matter, speache, and verse . . . so that, if
I commit an error, without blaming the Auctor, amend my amisse. (A3v 2–11)

Jones's address is also useful to establish that if the author was not available
to perfect his work, it was still preferable for another willing agent, includ-
ing the publisher, to correct it in preparation for the press rather than to
print the author's 'fyrst coppy'.[8]

The desirability of editorially annotated copy over an imperfect one
emerges both in single and in collected editions of early modern playbooks.
The 1591 edition of Lyly's *Endymion, the Man in the Moon* (STC 17050)
includes an address to the reader, where the publisher[9] explains that '[s]ince
the Plaies in Paules were dissolued, there are certaine Commedies come to
my handes by chaunce, vvhich were presented before her Maiestie at seuerall
times by the children of Paules', and that 'if any place [*Endymion*] shall
dysplease, I will take more paines to perfect the next' (A2r 3–11). The publish-
er's emphasis on aspects of this play that may 'displease' its readers rather
than errors, along with the fact that the text of this play is exceptionally
good,[10] may suggest that the manuscript copy did not require the interven-
tion of a correcting hand, but may have elicited the publisher's intervention
as a censoring agent. Far more explicit is the reference to the perfection of
copy in the well-known and often quoted dedicatory epistle signed by
Heminge and Condell included in Shakespeare's First Folio of 1623 (STC
22273).[11] Although Heminge and Condell inform their readers that they
have acted as the custodians of Shakespeare's works and they are now simply
presenting them to two worthy patrons – 'We haue but collected them, and
done an office to the dead, to procure his Orphanes, Guardians' (A2v 5–6) –
later on in the same epistle they specify that 'it hath bin the height of our
care, vvho are the Presenters, to make the present worthy of your H.H. by the
perfection' (A2v 11–13). The final sentence confirms that the printer's copy of
Shakespeare's works as they appear in the First Folio had been prepared for

the press and that Heminge and Condell take at least nominal responsibility for it: 'we most humbly consecrate to your H.H. these remaines of your seruant Shakespeare; that what delight is in them, may be euer your L.L. the reputation his, & the faults ours' (A2v 20–3).

The last four examples show that editorial annotation of copy seems to have been deemed not only acceptable but desirable even when the author was unavailable to act as the 'exequutor of his owne writings' (A2r 27–8). However, further examples show that if 'to perfect' meant 'to complete' rather than 'to correct' then the identity of the annotator did make a difference. Towards the end of the Interregnum, publishers of English drama became particularly eager to stress that their function was to preserve, rather than to perfect, the legacy of playwrights who had not survived the recent period of profound political changes and the closure of the theatres. When Humphrey Moseley published *The Last Remains of Sr John Suckling* in 1659, he lamented both the author's death and the blow inflicted on the court culture within which his works had first been conceived and enjoyed. Moseley was however comforted by the happy arrangement which ensured the survival of Suckling's works before he was forced to go abroad. As he explains to his readers,

being sequestred from the more serene Contentments of his native Country, [Suckling] first took care to secure the dearest and choisest of his Papers in the several Cabinets of his Noble and faithful Friends; and among other Testimonies of his worth, these elegant and florid Peeces of his Fancie were preserved in the custody of his truly honorable and vertuous Sister, with whose free permission they were transcribed, and now published exactly according to the Originals. This might be sufficient to make you acknowledge that these are the real and genuine Works of Sir *John Suckling*. (Wing s6130, A2v 3–19, A3r 1–2)

The moral integrity of the preservers of Suckling's works, 'his Noble and faithful Friends' and 'his truly honorable and vertuous Sister', is metonymically transferred to the printer's copy to guarantee its authenticity. Moseley seems particularly keen to celebrate the fact that copies of Suckling's works survived, unscathed, the temporary usurpation of legitimate political authority. A further address to the reader prefaced to the one dramatic work included by Moseley in his collection, namely Suckling's *The Sad One: A Tragedy*,[12] usefully contrasts the use of the terms 'imperfect' (that is 'erroneous' or 'faulty') and 'unfinish'd', to emphasize the fact that albeit 'unfinish'd', Suckling's copy required no annotating or perfecting hand to prepare it for the press:

I Hope I shall not need to crave your pardon for publishing this Dramatick Piece of Sir *John Suckling*, (Imperfect I cannot say, but rather unfinish'd) there being a kind

of Perfection even in the most deficient Fragments of this incomparable *Author*. To evince that this Copy was a faithful Transcript from his own handwriting, I have said enough in my former Epistle, and I thought it much better to send it into the world in the same state I found it, without the least addition, then procure it supplied by any other Pen. (A2r 3–11, A2v 1–7)

When, as in this instance, 'to perfect' means 'to supplement' by means of additions supplied by a different agent, then the incomplete fragment is regarded as a preferable alternative.

Also in 1659, Andrew Crooke and Henry Brome published a collection of *Five New Plays* by Richard Brome (Wing B4872) and prefaced it with an address to the reader which places a strong emphasis on their direct descent from authorial manuscripts: '[a]s for the *Stationers*, they bring these *Poems* as they had them from the *Author*; not suffering any false or busy hand to adde or make the least mutilation; having been more watchful over the Printers common negligence, than such work as this hath usually obtained' (A5v 8–15). The publishers' allusion to interference with authorial copy as a 'mutilation' inflicted on the sovereign body of the author's work reminds readers in the late 1650s of other outrageous acts of desecration of legitimate authority. A further allusion to the desirability of publishing five pre-revolutionary comedies in the late 1650s – 'for (a man would think) we have had too many *Tragedies*' (A3v 11–13) – reinforces the link, as in Moseley's edition of Suckling's works, between political and textual crimes which threaten the purity of genealogical and stemmatic lines of descent.

The later date of Suckling's and Brome's collections would seem to suggest a temporal shift in attitudes toward non-authorial preparation of dramatic copy for the press. However, while the emphasis placed on the link between the dead authors and their works is certainly in keeping with emergent models of singular and proprietary authorship,[13] the desirability of authoritative texts and of non-authorial annotation of copy are not mutually exclusive, as shown by a further reference to the quality of the printer's copy in the stationers' address to the reader prefaced to the second edition of Beaumont and Fletcher's *Comedies and Tragedies*. Having explained how the plays included in the first edition of 1647 had been annotated by a 'worthy Gentleman [who] had taken the pains (or rather the pleasure) to read over', the stationers proceed to advertise their new edition as 'incorrupt and genuine' (A1v 4–5), thus indicating that non-authorial correction (as opposed to completion) of the printer's copy was not seen as spurious interference.

More generally, while non-authorial completion or revision of an authoritative, though fragmentary, copy was increasingly regarded as

detrimental tampering, non-authorial preparation of dramatic copy for the press was valued both when it corrected a manuscript draft of a work which the author had failed to perfect and when it corrected imperfections which had found their way into earlier editions then used as printer's copy for later re-issues. Whether carried out by the author or by an annotator, the perfection of the printer's copy was seen as a necessary stage in the process of transmission of both dramatic and non-dramatic texts through the press. Preparation for the press was even described by Sir Aston Cokayne as a proper process, or 'method', specifically intended to negotiate the transmission of his dramatic works from manuscript to print: 'I have made some progress into a Play, to be called the Tragedy of *Ovid*, which (if my *Obstinate Lady*, and *Trappolin* take) I may be encouraged to perfect, and present to you hereafter, with some other things that are not yet put into method, fit for the Press' (*Small Poems of Divers Sorts* WING C4898, 1658, A5v 5–13).

To sum up, the allusions to preparation of copy in early modern printed playbooks collectively suggest that the widely held assumption, according to which dramatic texts printed more than once before 1709 simply deteriorated through the accumulation of new typographical errors as they were repeatedly submitted to the press, needs to be carefully revisited.[14]

'PUTTING INTO METHOD FIT FOR THE PRESS': OR, HOW DRAMATIC COPY WAS PREPARED FOR THE PRESS

The allusions to the perfection of dramatic copy surveyed above usefully foreground annotating readers as a previously overlooked category of textual agents involved in the transmission of English drama into print. However, they shed little light on their impact on the actual readings preserved by early printed playbooks. Since, as mentioned above, no manuscript or printed copies used to set up extant editions of early English drama have survived, the best way to establish how dramatic texts were perfected for the press is to identify patterns of textual variation in plays which were printed more than once, especially when they claim to be 'newly perused and amended' on their title pages. The case studies included in the second part of this book accordingly focus on the evolution of the texts of a selection of Shakespeare's plays as they were repeatedly reprinted during the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, and not on their transmission from manuscript to print.

Among the first printed playbooks to advertise editorial intervention on their title pages and to survive in more than one edition are the third quarto