Introduction

This book offers a detailed consideration of how Shakespearean play texts came about, including the material constraints and cultures of performance, publishing, printing, and reading that produced them. It then considers how these conditions impact upon reading early printed play texts. This is not a book for trained bibliographers. Instead, it outlines bibliographical insights and techniques to those who have engaged in the study of early printed play texts without having yet undertaken a course on bibliography. Jerome McGann pointed out in 1985 that 'textual/bibliographical studies, already conceived as "preliminary operations," are all but removed from the programme of literary studies' (McGann 1985: 181). McGann's claim is still true today, as bibliography is infrequently taught in undergraduate, masters, and PhD programmes in English. Although Ann Thompson and Gordon McMullan argue that 'the recent explosion of work' in 'editing and textual criticism' has brought them 'from the periphery of English studies to the much-debated centre' (Thompson and McMullan 2003: xvi–xvii), this enhanced critical interest has not been matched by increases in training for those not already entrenched within the profession.

In some respects, this lack of attention is understandable. Bibliography is a discrete field of enquiry, and as a discipline it takes years to master. Therefore this book makes no attempt to cover everything. Instead it is deliberately selective of the bibliographical, textual, and literary techniques that it outlines, and this selection is based upon those techniques that are most suited to early dramatic texts. Lengthier guides to bibliography have long been available, and even the much earlier work of McKerrow, Pollard, Greg, and Bowers is still largely unsurpassed in explaining the wider field of bibliographical research. There are currently no introductory guides to reading early modern dramatic texts, although there are very helpful and up-to-date introductions to the wider field of bibliography, including Philip Gaskell's *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (Gaskell 1972; revised 1995) and D. C. Greetham's *Textual Scholarship: An Introduction*

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(Greetham 1994). These titles deal with the history of the book from the origins of writing to the present, and the monumental efforts of both, although exemplary in achieving their aims, do not have full relevance or give much theatrically inflected information for those interested primarily in early modern printed drama. As Harry Sellers put it in an early review of McKerrow's *An Introduction to Bibliography for Literary Students*: 'In its immense wealth of curious detail there is a good deal of course that the ordinary "literary student" is not likely to need very often.' (Sellers 1927: 360.) This book is intended to outline the kinds of information that students and scholars of early modern drama do need.

Whilst the printed formats of prose narratives have changed little in the past four hundred years, Renaissance play texts can at first appear alien. Printing conventions for drama have changed, and so have conceptions of what makes an effective dramatic text. Early texts have looser deployments of scene breaks, speech headings, character names, and stage directions, for instance, and these differences can lead to a much altered sense of the meaning of a play. Plays were also subject to different censorship, mechanisms of revision, and markets, and they tended to be at a greater remove from their authors by the time they reached the printing house. As the typographical features and layout of a dramatic text differ so greatly from those of a non-dramatic text of the period, this book complements other introductions to bibliography.

Facsimiles of the early play texts are making the originals increasingly accessible for undergraduate and graduate students. Detailed digital photographs of Shakespeare are freely available through library websites like the 'Shakespeare in Quarto' site of the British Library; while *Early English Books Online* (EEBO) contains low-resolution reproductions of every printed Renaissance play. Whereas in past decades only professional scholars might access the rare books of restricted archives, now they are available for students at all levels. Bibliographical training becomes more and more necessary alongside the proliferation of the early texts.

The point of this book is to explain to the student (of English or drama or bibliography), faced with a page from a play written *c.*1588–1642, or a facsimile or EEBO equivalent, how it works, how it came about, what the different elements mean, and who created them. This book assumes that readers will be very familiar with early modern drama in modernised editions, but it assumes no familiarity with the original printed texts. A handful of plays by Shakespeare and his contemporaries are subject to frequent discussion, but many more are mentioned only in passing. The term 'Shakespearean play text' is used throughout this book to indicate

plays by both Shakespeare and his contemporaries – the general period of coverage ends in 1642, with the closure of the theatres, but some plays were performed in the period and published slightly later. Unless otherwise stated, all dates in this book refer to the dates of publication, and all cited copies are those found in EEBO. The complexities of negotiating texts from EEBO are discussed further in Chapter 3. Titles are usually modernised unless a specific point about their spelling or layout is being made.

Chapter 1 considers how theatrical companies acquired plays, and how those works received further revision in the process of being censored and adapted over time. Various states of the text might find their way to the printing house, and it is important to understand theories (from the straightforward to the entangled) of the possible origins of the manuscripts that underlie printed plays. The chapter further discusses theories of why plays came to be printed, and the various possibilities that might shape their production, including variations in format, author input, and alterations that might have emerged over the course of printing. Equally important are considerations of what extant dramatic manuscripts tell us about the type of documents encountered by printers. The mechanics of printing and producing books are briefly addressed. Although much is known about the production of specific plays, there are few such facts that can in turn become generalisations. Bibliographical work requires frequent recourse to words that express degrees of probability and conjecture. Many assertions about the processes and agents who brought about published play texts must remain speculative, but this chapter will make clear what is known, and what might be guessed at.

Chapter 2 considers the physical parts of early printed play texts and their functions. The features discussed include: title pages; dedications; illustrations; dramatis personae; arguments and scenes; act and scene divisions; stage directions; speech prefixes; verse and prose; individual characters; headlines and running titles; marginalia; signatures and page numbers; catchwords; and other paratext, such as ornaments, colophons, advertisements, errata. The chapter outlines how these different parts of the play text might or might not be present, and how they vary across plays. Specific examples are included alongside illustrations. Importantly, this chapter does more than just identify these locations and how they function. It also considers how a reading of original play texts must in part be shaped by the specific concerns of the early printers and publishers. By breaking down play texts into their constituent parts, this chapter offers a greater understanding of how printers dealt with the texts as a whole.

Chapter 3 addresses how the experience of reading the original quartos and folios shapes perceptions of plays. It considers at greater length the impact of missing or brief stage directions, and how misattributed speeches, uncorrected errors, and textual variants both within and across editions might be negotiated. In other words, the features that are *not* apparent to the reader at first glance are discussed, using specific examples. Of obvious relevance here is the printing of stage directions, many of which were regularised or expanded by scribes, theatre companies, or printing houses, while others were not supplied. Other features considered include the rendering of verse as prose and vice versa, the squeezing of lines because of space requirements, mistaken catchwords, and insertion of act and scene divisions. I discuss differences between reading texts intended for different markets, such as the larger collections (in folio) of Shakespeare's and Jonson's works, the smaller collections of James Shirley (1653), and quartos or octavos of single plays. The final part of this chapter describes techniques that can be used towards a bibliographical understanding of specific play texts.

Chapter 4 shows how the conventions of reproducing and editing Renaissance drama shape readings of the plays. The bulk of the chapter is devoted to modernised editions and how editorial policy affects the texts. The chapter focuses on the policies of the Arden, New Cambridge, and Oxford Shakespeare series. Important series of Renaissance drama not authored by Shakespeare are also touched upon. Most of these editions have a remarkable consistency in aiming to enhance the reader's awareness of performance, so I especially consider alterations and additions to stage directions. But I also examine other ways in which editions differ, especially on issues of emendation, insertions of act and scene divisions and locations, and commentary. Collation lines and how they can be negotiated are briefly discussed. The chapter ends with a consideration of electronic editions.

How to Read a Shakespearean Play Text shows many ways in which such texts can be read. Whether in originals, facsimiles, modernised editions, or e-texts, Shakespeare's works have thrived in a variety of reading contexts. Each of these contexts in various ways remains subservient to the published originals. The originals do not necessarily bring the reader closer to the 'true' plays, but they do form the basis, however remote, of a lengthy history of revision, adaptation, and modernisation. Therefore they must be a focus of attention for serious students of early modern drama.

CHAPTER I

The creation and circulation of play texts

This book is primarily concerned with the reading of printed play texts. But in order to understand such texts fully, it is necessary to understand how they came into being in the first place. This chapter considers how Shakespearean theatrical companies commissioned and shaped plays, how those works were further revised through censorship, rehearsal, touring, and revision, and how authors subsequently revised their own works. Any of these various states of a text might find its way to the printing house, leading to entangled subsequent theories as to its possible origins. Equally important will be considerations of what surviving dramatic manuscripts tell us about the type of documents encountered by printers, with the proviso that such determinations are difficult to make: 'whether or not we can accurately distinguish one from another, any kind of manuscript playbook that can conceivably have existed could conceivably have found its way into print' (Blayney 1997: 393). As Peter Blayney's statement implies, it is difficult to generalise about the movement of plays from the theatre to the printing press. Shakespeare's contemporaries, like John Heminges and Henry Condell, might categorise texts as deriving from 'true original' or 'stolen and surreptitious' copies, but the truth must often lie somewhere in between those poles. A play could certainly be 'stolen' from its author or theatre company, but copyright functioned very differently in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, where entries into the *Stationers' Register* usually established ownership for the purposes of printing a play, whether that ownership was rightfully obtained or not. More complex still is the issue of what might constitute an 'original' copy. Is it the draft first submitted by an isolated author to the theatre company? Or perhaps the text as first performed? As no examples of these types of texts can be said beyond doubt to survive, they remain Platonic ideals. But we can be more certain about the variety of processes that might lead to the printing of dramatic texts, and this chapter's primary function is to outline the various possible
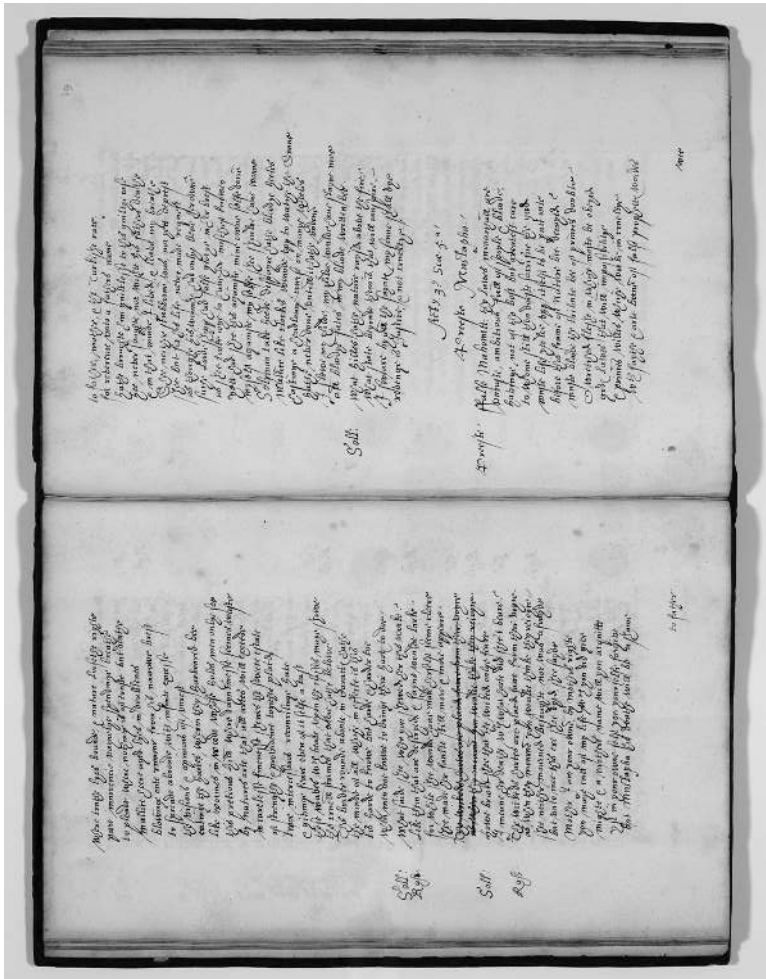
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Fig. 1. An opening of the Cambridge University Library *Mustapha*, MS ff. ll. 35 – a fair copy of a closet drama.

permutations that might affect the transmission of a play from author(s) to page.

WRITING PLAYS

The iconographic picture of Shakespeare sitting in his study, quill in hand and surrounded by books, has a powerful impact upon a conception of early modern play authorship. The long-standing exhibit of Shakespeare's 'desk' at his birthplace supports this image, as does the film *Shakespeare in Love* and even the recent *Dr Who* episode, 'The Shakespeare Code'. In fact, we know little about Shakespeare's compositional practices, or the practices of most other dramatic authors. Thanks to scholars interested in authorship, and particularly to the recent work of MacDonald P. Jackson and Brian Vickers, we can be fairly certain that Shakespeare did not compose all of his forty or so plays in isolation. At least in the versions that survive, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, *Henry VIII*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Timon of Athens*, *Pericles*, and *Sir Thomas More* were collaborative efforts. Collaboration of at least this frequency (if not more) was the norm for theatre of the period. It is traditional to see Shakespeare's plays as the products of individual genius. The practice of theatre companies in the early modern period, however, highlights a more collaborative possibility: that plays were 'written' by authors, actors, and others towards the goal of putting them on stage. The title page of the first quarto of *Titus Andronicus* (1594) offers a fairly typical example of this view of authorship: 'THE MOST LA- | mentable Romaine Tragedie of Titus Andronicus: | As it was Plaide by the Right Ho- | nourable the Earle of *Darbie*, Earle of *Pembrooke*, | and Earle of *Sussex* their Seruants.' There is no mention of Shakespeare in this quarto, and his name does not appear on any of his plays' title pages until 1598. Instead, the theatrical companies that performed the play occupy the space of 'author'. Such companies never fully relinquished their status as the original producers of the play, but over the period playwrights increasingly asserted their rights as named authors. Shakespeare himself never, as far as surviving evidence discloses, attempted to have his plays published. But other authors certainly did, and in doing so they made claims towards sole authorship of their works.

The 'author' of an early modern play is more likely to be part of a collaborative theatrical enterprise than an isolated genius. One of the purposes of this chapter is to outline all of the people who could have a hand in dramatic and textual production in the early modern period. I will spell out their possible influences, using surviving examples where available, and more speculative claims where not.

COMMISSIONING PLAYS

Philip Henslowe's *Diary*, a collection of accounts and asset lists for a variety of businesses including the Admiral's Men, offers some of the most comprehensive information about how plays were commissioned in Shakespeare's day. Henslowe was part owner of the Rose, Fortune, and Hope playhouses, and his business dealings with the players tell us much about the composition histories of plays performed in public theatres. (Unfortunately, there is no mention in the *Diary* of either Shakespeare or a play known to be by Shakespeare.) Henslowe importantly shows that most of the plays put on by his company were written collaboratively, and that these plays, when revived for later audiences, were subject to further subsequent additions and revisions. The accounts from 1598 and beyond offer a particularly detailed outline of playbook acquisition for the various companies playing at the Rose. They disclose that 'Normally the conception for a play originated with the playwright' (Carson 1988: 55), but a variety of collaborators might contribute towards the final text. Further, collaboration might come through complex interactions, including:

(1) Theatre company approval of a draft 'plot' for a playwright to complete in full.
(2) Theatre company accepting parts or acts of a play from a given playwright so that remaining parts might be written by another author.
(3) Theatre company instigating revision by the original author or another collaborator.

Ben Jonson, more widely known for his sole-authored pieces, provides an interesting case of someone who participated in multiple modes of authorship. In December 1597 he showed the company the plot of an unnamed play which they approved for completion:

Lent vnto Bengemen Johnsone the [2]3 of desemb*er*
1597 vpon a Bocke wch he was to writte for vs
befor crysmas next after the date herof wch he
showed th*e* plotte vnto the company I saye
lente in Redy money vnto hime the some of xxs.
(Henslowe 1961: 73)

Here Jonson approaches 'the company' with the plot of a play he intended to write in full, and the loan of 20 shillings presumably would be used to cover his expenses while writing. We know from Jonson's 1630s play fragments, *Mortimer* and *The Sad Shepherd*, that his compositional method

included writing out a plot, a fairly lengthy prose description of each act,
before constructing his plays. In this sense his method of composing plays
might have been shaped early in his career by the economic necessity of
compiling an outline quickly as collateral for a loan. On 23 October 1598,
this, or possibly another, plot by Jonson was selected to be finished by
George Chapman:

Lent . . . vnto m^r Chapman*e* one his play*e*
boock*e* & ij ectes of A traged*ie* of bengemens plott*e*
th*e* some of   iij^li.

(Henslowe 1961: 100)

From what we know of Jonson's career, he could not have been happy about
having someone else write two acts of his play. He notoriously excised his
collaborative plays from those he collected in his *Workes* of 1616, and in the
case of *Sejanus* he deleted and rewrote the shares of his collaborator (prob-
ably George Chapman). He was also apparently teased about being slow to
produce work, as he alludes in the Prologue to *Volpone* (A4v). Henslowe's
company might have become fed up with waiting for Jonson to deliver
the final manuscript. Yet they continued to pay him for various authorial
duties concerning plays first written by others. Jonson received payment
for 'new adicyons' to Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* on 25 September 1601 and
22 June 1602 (Henslowe 1961: 182, 203). Kyd's play had been composed
over a decade earlier, and clearly the company felt that it needed updating.

   These three sets of business arrangements between Jonson and the actor–
managers of the Rose disclose that the playwright patched together income
from a variety of composition practices. Jonson carefully erased this early
part of his career by ignoring these works in his subsequent publications.
Instead, he constructed an image of a single, if not overbearing, authority
for his texts (Giddens 2010). He grew to disdain collaboration, and like
Shakespeare, has become known as a poet of individual genius. But these
efforts at singular self-promotion by Jonson, or apparent self-suppression
(or at least silence) by Shakespeare (as in the *Titus Andronicus* title page),
disguise more typical modes of script production. At the Rose Theatre,
'collaborated plays accounted for 60 per cent of the plays completed in
Fall–Winter 1598, and an astonishing 82 per cent in Spring–Summer 1598'
(Carson 1988: 57). Such collaborations needed to be seamless in order to be
successful. These figures substantiate a claim that joint authorship was more
common than the forms of sole authority we ascribe to authors traditionally
given 'complete works'. The most famous theatrical collaboration from the
period was that of Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, whose works,

alongside those of their collaborators, were collected in folio in 1647. As George Lisle's dedication in that volume attests: '*For still your fancies are so wov'n and knit*, | *'Twas* Francis-Fletcher, *or* Iohn Beaumont *writ*' (b1). Scholars today invest much time in discerning the authorship divisions of plays, but clearly such divisions were of less concern to the early modern play-going and -reading public.

The Henslowe papers disclose several varieties of collaborative authorship, whereby seemingly haphazard and disjointed methods of arriving at a single script point to some complex possibilities for establishing the 'origins' of a given text. Collaboration could be based upon act-division, sub-plot, or genre, or could be divided between one writer who worked on plots and another who versified. And as Neil Carson argues, 'it is likely that in some cases collaboration was more complicated than these theories allow' (Carson 1988: 58). As many as six authors might unite in the effort towards producing a single play. With so many hands available, it is likely that a variety of practices might have stitched their ideas and lines together. Importantly, even single authorship was subject to collaborative negotiation with actor–managers, premised upon very commercial concerns about the possible success of subject material.

It is also difficult, in the absence of comparable records, to determine how far the activities recorded by Henslowe reflect the practices of other acting companies. For instance, Henslowe's *Diary* in part suggests that the entire company would receive, and therefore approve, a draft of a play, yet Tiffany Stern asserts that the role of dealing with a play manuscript would properly devolve only to the prompter, who not only supplied forgotten lines during a production, but generally acted as stage-manager and book-keeper: 'He did not expect anyone else to have dealings with his book' (Stern 2004: 144). Another caveat emerges because Henslowe's records are almost certainly incomplete, so statements about the proportionality of a given activity could be somewhat inaccurate. Yet, as Neil Carson asserts, 'Until new evidence is forthcoming we must conclude that the working conditions of dramatists writing for the Admiral's Men were probably typical of the time' (Carson 1988: 55). The Henslowe papers, as our most substantive evidence about early theatrical practices, suggest that early play manuscripts have their origins in messy and difficult-to-determine circumstances of authorship.[1]

[1] The Henslowe papers can now be subject to wider scrutiny, as they are available online (www.henslowe-alleyn.org.uk).