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978-0-521-88917-9 - The Struggle for Shakespeare's Text: Twentieth-Century Editorial Theory and Practice

Gabriel Egan

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## THE STRUGGLE FOR SHAKESPEARE'S TEXT

### *Twentieth-Century Editorial Theory and Practice*

We know Shakespeare's writings only from imperfectly made early editions, from which editors struggle to remove errors. The New Bibliography of the early twentieth century, refined with technological enhancements in the 1950s and 1960s, taught generations of editors how to make sense of the early editions of Shakespeare and use them to make modern editions. This book is the first complete history of the ideas that gave this movement its intellectual authority, and of the challenges to that authority that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. Working chronologically, Egan traces the struggle to wring from the early editions evidence of precisely what Shakespeare wrote. The story of another struggle, between competing interpretations of the evidence from early editions, is told in detail and the consequences for editorial practice are comprehensively surveyed, allowing readers to discover just what is at stake when scholars argue about how to edit Shakespeare.

GABRIEL EGAN began his academic career at Shakespeare's Globe theatre in London, where, in addition to teaching theatre history and running workshops on the Globe stage, he taught students to print on a replica wooden hand-press using the methods employed in Shakespeare's time. He is the author of *Shakespeare and Marx* (2004), *Green Shakespeare: From Ecopolitics to Ecocriticism* (2006) and *The Edinburgh Critical Guide to Shakespeare* (2007). He edited the play *The Witches of Lancashire* by Richard Brome and Thomas Heywood (2002), and co-edits the journals *Theatre Notebook* and *Shakespeare*.

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## *Preface*

The origins of this book lie in the negative response I received to a proposal for an edition of *All's Well that Ends Well* in Michael Best's series *Internet Shakespeare Editions* in the final years of the last millennium. An anonymous peer reviewer's criticisms of my wildly ambitious plan for the edition were grounded in the belief that the entire edifice of what is known as New Bibliographical editorial theory and practice had recently been overturned and that the most I might offer would be to reprint the Folio text of the play purged of its egregious errors. In making sense of this reader's report and its rejection of my proposal I felt the need for a history of the intellectual tradition of the New Bibliography and an account of the growing influence of its detractors since the 1970s. There was no such history in existence and this book fulfils my desire to write one; I hope it also fulfils a need felt by others for such a history. In the early 1940s F. P. Wilson surveyed the New Bibliographical tradition up to that point, but since then there have been only journal articles and book chapters that address particular parts of the tradition, or briefly summarize the whole of it, sometimes to defend but mostly to attack it. In this book I attempt to tell the full story from the beginning of the twentieth century to the date of writing (2010). I engage in the story to the extent of defending certain aspects and certain varieties of New Bibliography as essential to future editorial work, while acknowledging its logical weaknesses and proposing the adoption of certain parts of the critiques that have been made of it. In surveying the attacks on New Bibliography it is striking how seldom its adherents have been proved wrong on the hard facts of a case, and I have taken care to give those rare proofs the fullest possible credence. As will become clear, the main differences of opinion arise from the differing philosophical traditions that underpin the various commentators' approaches to simple questions of human agency.

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## *Acknowledgements*

Parts of the conclusion to this book first appeared in reviews of recent scholarship (1999–2008) in *The Year's Work in English Studies* and I am grateful to Lisa Hopkins, Matt Steggle, William Baker and Kenneth Womack for their editorial work on those reviews and to the publisher Oxford University Press for permission to reuse them. Other parts of the conclusion appeared in the article 'Intention in the Editing of Shakespeare' published in an issue of the journal *Style* and I would like to thank its editor Cary DiPietro for permission to reuse the material and for a penetrating critique that improved it. Parts of Appendix 3 were first presented orally at the 2007 meeting of the Society for History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing, in Minneapolis, and I am grateful for the appropriately sharp questions and comments made by members of the audience on that occasion.

For answering specific questions about their work and discussing mine, I thank T. H. Howard-Hill, Andrew Murphy, Richard Dutton, Reg Foakes, Jerome J. McGann, Andrew Gurr, Paul Werstine, MacDonald P. Jackson, Randall McLeod, Gary Taylor, H. R. Woudhuysen, Richard Proudfoot, John Jowett and Stanley Wells. Andrew Murphy also gave excellent advice on the structure and format of this book. For supporting grant applications made in connection with the research in this book I am grateful to Ian Gadd, Suzanne Gossett, Thomas L. Berger, Stanley Wells and John Jowett. Reg Foakes and John Jowett read and critiqued parts of the typescript and generously shared their thoughts on the entire project. Three anonymous readers at Cambridge University Press gave invaluable comments and suggestions regarding the structure and focus of the argument. The idea for the book first took shape over tea with Sarah Stanton in October 2001 and since then she has sustained it with dozens of emails, a series of meetings, and numerous suggestions for improvement. The fruits of all her contributions are gratefully absorbed into the present work. Damian Love's meticulous scholarly copy-editing of this book many times saved the author from embarrassing slips and improved the sense.

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When work on this book began in the first years of the twenty-first century, the only place it could be done was a specialist research library. The library of the Shakespeare Institute in Stratford-upon-Avon gave the ideal environment and I am grateful to librarians James Shaw, Kate Welch and Karin Brown for hundreds of responses beyond the call of duty. By the time the book was being completed in 2010, computer technology had transformed early modern literary research. The providers of the following resources enabled the work to proceed anywhere with an Internet connection. JSTOR (an archive of journal article back issues) was the brilliant idea of William B. Bowen of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and was piloted by the University of Michigan. Project Muse (distributing recent and new issues of journals electronically) started at Johns Hopkins University with support from the Mellon Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities. The Internet Archive provides full-text access to hundreds of thousands of out-of-print books. The Database of Early English Playbooks (DEEP), hosted by the University of Pennsylvania, was created by Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser and combines essential performance and publication data for plays up to the Restoration, making redundant a number of expensive reference books and greatly enhancing researchers' modes of access to the information. The commercial database of page images, Early English Books Online (EEBO), is provided by the company ProQuest but its full-text searchable supplement the Text Creation Partnership is a project of the University of Michigan led by Shawn Martin. A commercial database called the Oxford University Press Journals Digital Archive was essential for early issues of the journal *The Library*.

With the exception of the Internet Archive and DEEP (which are free to all) these resources were provided to me, a state employee, via deals struck by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC), the United Kingdom government's provider of information technology to institutions of higher

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education. I would like to thank JISC Collections for having the foresight to strike such deals and for making the substantial investments required to sustain them. Without these resources this book would have been much delayed, if completed at all.



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*A note on references, quotations,  
names and pronouns*

References are given by parenthetical author and date, followed by page, signature or leaf numbers where relevant, keyed to the single list of Works cited; multiple references within one pair of parentheses are separated by a semicolon. The author's name is dropped from the reference if it is obvious from the context. Because many readers now have access to them via Early English Books Online (EEBO), sixteenth- and seventeenth-century editions are referenced by signature rather than the Through Line Numbering of modern reprints (such as Shakespeare 1968b and the Shakespeare Quarto Facsimiles series), which are rather less widely available. Compared to Through Line Numbering, use of signatures enables many more readers to follow up a reference at the cost of only a small loss of precision. Where the source is a manuscript a modern transcription or facsimile is cited and, for the convenience of readers consulting the originals or different editions, referenced by leaf number and side (a or b). On first mention (discoverable from the index), the current location and call mark of each manuscript is given parenthetically. Quotations of Shakespeare where no edition is identified are from the electronic version of the Oxford *Complete Works* edited by Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett and William Montgomery, as are the word-counts mentioned in the conclusion and the dates of composition accepted throughout (Shakespeare 1989b). Where emphasis appears in quotations, it is in all cases not mine but copied from the source.

The terms used to categorize early modern manuscripts and books are themselves the topic of considerable disagreement, and three particular choices must be explained. Although the word *prompt-book* (or *prompt-copy*) was used by the New Bibliographers with rather too strong an expectation of regularity and uniformity (perhaps by influence from nineteenth-century theatrical practice) it remains a useful label for manuscripts that are directly concerned with making things happen on time during the performance (Jowett 2007, 35) and I retain it for that reason. The adjective in the expression *bad quartos* is commonly placed in scare quotes (shorthand

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for the phrase *so-called*), indicating reluctance to condemn them as bad. Just which early editions belong in this category is debatable, but because there are editions with distinctly garbled versions of lines better presented in other editions the adjective need not be applied tentatively: these are bad editions by comparison with the others, and the scare quotes are not used here. Historians of print culture have not settled on a single term for the places of work where books were made. Some call them printing offices, others printing houses, and others printshops. The first of these is misleadingly suggestive of sedentary labour using desks and ledgers and the second might imply large commercial empires ('House of ...' in modern business) so the third term, printshops, is adopted here. By analogy with bodyshops and workshops, the term printshops helpfully captures the sense of practical and dirty physical labour expended to make early modern books.

When referred to abstractly or as performances (rather than as documents) the titles of Shakespeare's plays are drawn from the Oxford *Complete Works*, so what are elsewhere commonly known as *2 Henry 6*, *3 Henry 6* and *Henry 8* are here called *The Contention of York and Lancaster*, *Richard Duke of York* and *All is True*, and whereas *King Lear* is often still treated as one play it is here treated as two, *The History of King Lear* and *The Tragedy of King Lear*. Where there is disagreement about how to number the early editions of a book (do the quartos of *1 Henry 4* start with Q0 or Q1?) I have followed the numbering of the Oxford *Complete Works's Textual Companion* (Wells *et al.* 1987) even where the research being described did not. The English language is notably deficient in gender-neutral pronouns and, since many years of conventional usage have established that one of the genders may stand for both, I have elected to use feminine pronouns when referring abstractly to the reader, writer or editor of a book. However, early modern printshop workers (but not stationers) and theatre personnel (with the exception of gatherers taking money from spectators) were exclusively men and this historical fact is acknowledged by use of masculine pronouns for them.