



Giles E. Dawson

FOUR CENTURIES
OF SHAKESPEARE
PUBLICATION

LAWRENCE
University of Kansas Libraries
1964

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Since *Venus and Adonis* was first offered to the public, in 1593, Shakespeare's plays and poems have been published in a great many editions—and not only English language editions, but editions in some seventy other languages. But I am to talk about quality rather than quantity—about the quality of the text of Shakespeare that publishers have sold to the public in the past 371 years.

Since the beginning of the eighteenth century, many editors have worked hard at the task of making the Shakespeare text more readable and easier to understand than they found it. A few men, like Capell, Steevens, Malone, Halliwell-Phillipps, and the two H. H. Furnesses, and also one or two of our contemporaries, have devoted large portions of their lives to this pursuit of textual purity in Shakespeare's works. And scores of lesser men have pursued the same object in a smaller way. And what has been the result of it all? There have been results, and good results. But the editors and the textual critics have had no very powerful impact on the way in which Shakespeare is offered to the public at large. If you walk into a bookstore and ask for the complete works of Shakespeare, you are unlikely to get a really good product.

For this regrettable state of affairs it is hard to assign any blame. The public does not insist on getting a good text because the public doesn't know that it ought to insist. It is not aware of distinctions between good text and bad. The publisher, on his part, can hardly be blamed for selling the kind of product that the most people will buy. Still, it is the publisher who determines the text and is therefore responsible. My specific topic here is the nature and the extent of the publishers' responsibility and the effects it has had.

A publisher is a man who makes his living by guessing right. When he accepts the manuscript of a new book for publication, he is undertaking to pay the costs of editing, printing, binding,

advertising, and distribution. Before making up his mind on whether to publish or not to publish, he must calculate the probabilities that enough copies will sell at a pre-determined price and in a reasonable space of time to pay the costs and render him a substantial net profit. However careful his calculations, one imponderable factor will always make the difference between success and failure. That factor is the appetites and tastes of the reading public at any given moment. Certain books, certain kinds of books, certain authors are in time established as perennially safe investments, and the more of these books and authors a publisher's list contains, the less his risk, the bigger his profits. Shakespeare has long been such an author.

These fairly obvious principles operated in much the same way in Shakespeare's day as they do in our own, though in other respects the publishing trade has changed. Four hundred years ago publishing was not big business. We may almost say that there was no such thing as a publisher. Books were published by booksellers, mainly retail booksellers. The book trades were those of bookseller, stationer, printer, and binder. In England in 1557 all of these trades were organized in one trade company called the Stationers' Company, which operated under royal charter. The charter imposed some government regulation, including censorship. But in exchange the members of the company received much advantage: they enjoyed a tight monopoly; they controlled prices and wages; they had their own court, with powers of search and seizure, and they established their own regulations. One of their regulations required booksellers to enter, in a book that we now call the Stationers' Register, the title of every book about to be published. Another regulation required that any book so entered by one member of the company could not be published by anyone else. This rule amounted to copyright—a limited kind of copyright, designed to benefit members of the trade rather than authors. It was not

limited in duration, but was perpetual, and a publisher's copyrights were an important part of his stock in trade. They were bought and sold; they descended from father to son, from husband to widow.

Such were the legal conditions of publishing when Shakespeare's plays were coming on the market. With the first appearance of these plays in print, beginning with *Titus Andronicus* in 1594, I need not here concern myself. The so-called "bad" quartos would qualify for treatment here as examples of publications motivated by a desire for gain, without any consideration of the low quality of the texts. But these quartos have been fully examined, and the conditions that permitted their production fully explored, and I can perhaps more profitably spend my time on matters not quite so well known.

The logical starting point for my purpose is the First Folio edition of the plays, published in 1623. Later on, there will be occasion for me to find fault with certain publishers for their standards and their methods, but for William and Isaac Jaggard, the principal publishers of this collection, one need feel nothing but respect. It has been a view commonly held that it was Shakespeare's fellow players who, perhaps as an act of piety, promoted this first publication of the collected plays. Sir Walter Greg held the view as recently as 1954. A foreword printed in the First Folio and subscribed by John Heminge and Henry Condell tells of the care and labor that these two men bestowed on the gathering and selection of the texts. The two men were fellows of Shakespeare, players in his company, and that they actually did the job of gathering and selecting, there is no reason to doubt. But the additional fact that Shakespeare, in his will, attested to his special friendship with Heminge and Condell by leaving money to each for memorial rings is not necessarily connected with their part in the publication of his plays seven years later. While he lived, Shakespeare was their friend; after his passing—seven years after it—

they were willing to take some trouble for the preservation of his memory. Or perhaps they were not concerned with memory. Perhaps they were helping out another old friend, William Jaggard, who had had earlier connections with the stage and probably with Shakespeare's company. While we can't dismiss altogether the possibility that Shakespeare had asked Heminge and Condell to see his plays printed, such evidence as there is suggests rather that Shakespeare was as indifferent to the immortality offered by print as most other playwrights were. On the whole, I think it probable that the Jaggards themselves were the prime movers in the publication and that it was they who sought the help of the players. The Jaggards were moved, we must assume, not by any sentimental feelings about the author but by the recognition of an opportunity to make money. If someone had not recognized this opportunity, the collection would never have been printed and we should all have been the losers. If, in printing the plays, the Jaggards exhibited no great zeal for textual purity, this is no matter for surprise. They were employing in the practice of their trade such standards as were then prevalent among printers and publishers of plays.

Of the succeeding folio editions, published in 1632, 1663, and 1685, there is little for me to say. Each was printed from the one before it. Only the Third Folio bears on my subject. It was first issued in 1663, and in the following year it was reissued with a new title-page and a new publisher's gimmick. To the thirty-six plays that had been printed in the First Folio and reprinted in the Second, are now added seven more, of which only *Pericles* has stood the test of time. The other six had all at some time been printed in quarto with either Shakespeare's name or the initials W. S. on the title-page. But it is probable that in the first instance Shakespeare's name, so used, was no more than a somewhat fraudulent catch-penny feature, as in 1664 it almost certainly was. Some of the six plays are pretty

good; one or two are in their ways excellent, but none of them shows the impress of Shakespeare's hand. Philip Chetwynd, the 1664 publisher, added them with a statement on the title which was true but misleading, that "unto this impression is added seven playes never before printed in Folio." The three succeeding editions of Shakespeare all duly included the seven apocryphal plays.

The next high point in the history of Shakespeare publication was the appearance, in 1709, of an edition published by Jacob Tonson and edited by Nicholas Rowe. It was important in several ways, but first of all because it marked the taking over of Shakespeare by the man who, with his successors, was for the next forty-eight years to be almost the sole publisher of Shakespeare's works. Jacob Tonson was, by 1709, the biggest, richest, and most influential London publisher. He owned a half interest in the copyright of *Paradise Lost*; he owned more of Dryden than anyone else did; he was an intimate friend and publisher of many of the leading literary figures of the time: Addison and Steele, Congreve, Pope. Most important of all, he had, by 1709, acquired the copyrights of all of Shakespeare's plays except three or four.

The edition that he published in 1709 was bold and revolutionary in a number of ways. It was designed to appeal to large numbers of readers. It was the first multi-volume edition, its six volumes being attractive and easy to handle in comparison with the cumbersome folios of the century just ended. And it was easy to read, for the plays were consistently divided into acts and scenes, the locale of each scene was indicated, many new stage-directions were added, and a *dramatis personae* was supplied for each play. The first biography of Shakespeare formed part of the preliminary matter. As editor, Tonson chose Nicholas Rowe, a poet and the author of half a dozen of the best and most popular plays of the time, among them *Jane Shore* and *Lady Jane Grey*. Rowe's familiarity with the classics,

his extensive knowledge of literature, and his practical experience with drama and the stage eminently fitted him, according to the standards then prevailing, for his task as editor.

That Rowe's edition was printed from the Fourth Folio instead of the First, that he did not truly understand the principles of textual criticism would not justify our adopting a supercilious attitude toward his work. We must not forget that the editing of English texts, except for the Bible, was then almost unknown. Rowe had no McKerrow or Greg or Bowers to tell him how he ought to go about the job. That he did not make extensive use of the quartos is less remarkable than that he made some. For the *Othello* text he did make extensive use of the 1655 quarto, and he must have known the 1637 quarto of *Romeo and Juliet*, for he printed from it the sonnet prologue, "Two households, both alike in dignity. . . ." When Rowe came to *Hamlet* (a play in which he must have seen his friend Betterton play the title role) it is not surprising that for those portions of the play which the folio text omitted, he turned to the Bettertonian quarto of 1703, restoring from it more than half of the omitted lines.

I am here, however, to talk about publishers, not editors. Actually they are not easy to keep separate. To some degree, whatever of credit or blame we may assign to the Rowe edition of Shakespeare belongs to Jacob Tonson. It was he who selected the editor; it was he who stood to make or lose money by the edition. It is hard to believe therefore that the plan of the edition was not conceived out of his experience rather than out of Rowe's. Furthermore, the sum of £36 10s. which Tonson is said to have paid Rowe for his work was meagre, considering that it covered the biography, which entailed no inconsiderable amount of research. It is therefore not impossible that Tonson hired some anonymous hack to perform the drudgery of stage-directions and scene-divisions, of which, though some have been altered, many still survive in twentieth-century editions. That

Tonson's conception of an edition of Shakespeare was sound from a commercial point of view is evidenced by the fact that within a year of its publication the first edition was followed by a second—a reprint so nearly identical with the first that it was not until 1934 that the existence of two 1709 editions was recognized.

Even yet I am not quite finished with the Tonson-Rowe edition, for I must presently come back to a consideration of a kind of supplementary volume containing Shakespeare's poems. First, however, I have to describe another and quite independent edition of the poems that beat the Tonson supplement into print by just one month. This was a small octavo volume, published on August 3rd, 1709, with a title that went as follows:

A Collection of Poems, Viz. I. Venus and Adonis. II. The Rape of Lucrece. III. The Passionate Pilgrim. IV. Sonnets to Sundry Notes of Musick. By Mr. William Shakespeare. London, Printed for Bernard Lintott, at the Cross-Keys between the Two Temple Gates in Fleetstreet. Price bound One Shilling Six-pence.

Each poem has its own title-page which correctly identifies the edition used as copy text—the 1630 edition for *Venus and Adonis*, 1632 for *Lucrece*, 1599 for *The Passionate Pilgrim*. Some two years later this little octavo volume was followed by a second, containing the *Sonnets*, printed from the first edition of 1609. The texts are all carefully printed, with a minimum of emendation. What is still more surprising is that the spelling and even the punctuation of the copy texts are reproduced with remarkable fidelity. When the anonymous editor—or perhaps it was the compositor—came on a spelling that looked too archaic and outlandish to be intelligible, he altered it. Occasionally a passage that appeared corrupt was emended, but always conservatively and cautiously. Whatever motives—whatever conscious editorial principles—lay behind this edition, the texts gave the poems to the public in a form little altered

from the first editions. The fact that this admirable publication was driven from the market by a much inferior rival affords a striking example of the kind of harmful influence that unmitigated commercialism has exerted in the book trade.

The inferior product that killed Lintott's market succeeded by a publisher's trick. Tonson's edition of Shakespeare did not include the nondramatic poetry because Tonson did not own the copyrights. He thus created an opportunity which another publisher, the notorious Edmund Curll, was quick to grasp. Curll was not overscrupulous about copyright, and in this case he seems not to have been challenged. Publication of Tonson's edition of the plays was announced in the *Daily Courant* of June 6, 1709. Curll's volume was announced three months later. It was identical with Tonson's volumes in format and size and bore a title-page made to look like Tonson's volume-titles and reading as follows:

The Works of Mr. William Shakespear. Volume the Seventh. Containing, Venus & Adonis. Tarquin & Lucrece And his Miscellany Poems. With Critical Remarks on his Plays, &c. to which is Prefix'd an Essay on the Art, Rise and Progress of the Stage in Greece, Rome and England. London: Printed for E. Curll at the Dial and Bible against St. Dunstan's Church, and E. Sanger at the Post-House at Middle-Temple Gate. MDCCX.

Like Tonson's edition of the plays, this spurious appendage was printed in both ordinary-paper and large-paper sizes, and it is to-day frequently found as the last volume of a seven-volume set. Retail booksellers undoubtedly pushed the fake seventh volume as an integral part of the Tonson set. Curll's trick was evidently successful, for when Tonson in 1714 brought out his so-called second edition (actually the third), Curll and his associates again followed with a ninth volume to be added to the eight-volume set. There was nothing unlawful about Curll's trick of hooking free rides on Tonson's wagon—except in so far as Curll's original publication may have been a piracy.

But I suppose Tonson grew tired of seeing another man reap profit from his reputation. There soon appeared a genuine nine-volume issue of the works with a cancel title, bearing both Tonson's and Curll's names in the imprint. Tonson had made an arrangement with Curll, giving him, no doubt, a cut on the profits of the whole set.

Curll's editions of the poems were poor botched-up affairs edited by Charles Gildon. *Venus and Adonis* he printed from Lintott's first volume (which appeared just a month before his own), with much, but not all of the spelling modernized and many passages emended in a free-and-easy manner. *The Rape of Lucrece* (called *Tarquin and Lucrece*) he printed from the fourth volume of *Poems on Affairs of State*, 1707. Worst of all, instead of printing the *Sonnets* from Thorpe's 1609 edition, which he may not have known, Gildon reproduced Benson's sorry collection of 1640, which was incomplete, which rearranged the sonnets singly or in small clusters, with added titles that in many cases obscured or altered the original sense. And it was padded out with poems by other men.

What makes Curll's editions so good an illustration for my purpose is that, unlike Lintott's excellent collection, it was reprinted fourteen times. The last reprint formed a supplement, in 1808, to the second Boston edition of the dramatic works. Until 1780 no edition of the collected poems printed in England after Lintott's contained the genuine *Sonnets* in their original form. During most of the 18th century, therefore, the only form in which a person could buy the *Sonnets* was in the deformed Benson version, which would have died quietly in 1640 if Curll had not dug it up and given it a new life.

It may have been the commercial success of the Rowe edition—edited by the most popular dramatist of his day—that later persuaded Jacob Tonson II that readers and buyers would be unable to resist a Shakespeare edited by the greatest of living poets. Whatever suggested the idea, it was about 1721 that

Tonson and Alexander Pope entered into an agreement which led in time to the publication of Pope's edition—in six impressive quarto volumes of excellent typography. That was in 1725, and the subscription price was five guineas in sheets. The poet's willingness to undertake the job is understandable in view of the payment of £217 12s. that he received¹—almost exactly six times what Rowe had got.

Pope's editorial work in the preparation of his text has in recent years been sufficiently studied to make its small worth now generally understood. Pope was peculiarly unfitted for what he called "the dull duty of an editor." That he worked hard at it need not be questioned, nor may we doubt his sincerity in the promise made in his preface of a carefully regulated text. He deserves credit for things he meant to do and for some things that he did do. He was certainly the first editor of Shakespeare to grasp the importance of the comparison and evaluation of early texts—the first, as well, to attempt a complete listing of early editions of separate plays. To have been able to make a wise selection or a proper use of them he would need to have been born much later.

The underlying principle that renders his editorial work unreliable was generally shared by Pope's contemporaries and rivals but was applied with greater licence by him than by others. In constructing his text his aim was to make the plays conform, poetically, dramatically, and in their language to the tastes of his own time. Lacking any special training for the task, unfamiliar with the language and manners of Shakespeare's day, he rode with a loose rein through the text, altering, substituting, correcting without control. More often than not his alterations are silently made. When he defines a word in a footnote, he does it by guess. He adopts for the first time the unfortunate practice of marking with inverted commas the "shining passages" and the worse practice of degrading to the lower margin the passages that displeased him—usually with

the explanation that the lines were interpolations by the ignorant actors.²

An unauthorized eight-volume reprint of the Pope edition appeared in Dublin in 1726, and two years later Tonson brought out a nine-volume duodecimo reprint. Of the commercial success of these trade editions I have no reliable knowledge. Of the large and expensive quarto edition we have George Steevens's assertion that the edition consisted of 750 sets and that Jacob Tonson III still had 140 of these on his hands forty-two years later. In any case, Pope's edition achieved much greater influence than its limited virtues justified. Hanmer used it as the copy text for his edition of 1744. Hanmer's text is basically Pope's, with Pope's very numerous scene-divisions, his stage directions, and his degradations (but not his shining passages). In 1747 Warburton made the same use of Pope in preparing his edition. Dr. Johnson too later printed in part from Pope and adopted his scene-divisions. A Glasgow edition and several Edinburgh editions were likewise based on Pope. In short, this inferior text exerted a strong influence for half a century.

The acquisition of most of the Shakespeare copyrights permitted the first Tonson to publish the 1709 edition. But in that very year there was passed the first copyright statute, the main purpose of which was to protect authors. It provided that owners of copyrights "Shall have the sole Right and Liberty of Printing such Book and Books for the Term of One and twenty Years, to Commence from the said Tenth Day of April [1710], and no longer." This wording would seem to put an end to the old perpetual copyright that booksellers had enjoyed time out of mind. But if this was the intention of the men who drafted the bill, they clouded the issue by adding, near the end, the following vague proviso: "That nothing in this act contained shall extend, either to Prejudice or Confirm any Right that . . . any Person or Persons have, or claim to have, to

the Printing or Reprinting of any Book or Copy already Printed, or hereafter to be Printed.” I don’t know what meaning was to be attached to that provision; but Tonson and the other big members of the trade, the owners of the old and valuable copyrights, lay under no such difficulty. They took it to mean that the statute applied only to copyright created after 1710—for, they argued, the Parliament could not have intended to rob them of their most valued possessions and thus defraud widows and orphans of their just inheritance. Therefore they simply took no notice, where old copyrights were concerned, of the expiration of the statutory twenty-one years in 1731.

But the book-trade was not made up solely of rich and successful magnates. There was also a brood of hungry small tradesmen—men not endowed with valuable old copyrights. These doubtless believed that perpetual copyright died in 1710—that Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden and the like were in the public domain. Soon after 1731, infringements of the older and more valuable copyrights—or supposed copyrights—began to be common. In reply to such infringements, the big men usually applied to the Court of Chancery for temporary injunctions, and these the Court usually granted. Ordinarily the little challenger then lost his nerve and acquiesced in the injunction, and there the matter dropped. A suit in Chancery could go on for years and involve heavy costs. A Tonson could afford such costs; a small tradesman couldn’t. For the most part therefore, the small men were frustrated of their natural wish to get a slice of the Shakespeare melon and the other juicy-looking melons.

One small man was undaunted and had persuaded himself that Tonson had no rights in Shakespeare. This man’s name, Robert Walker, first appeared in an imprint in 1729, to the best of my knowledge. He was the first man to challenge the Shakespeare copyrights by printing the plays—all of them, including the apocryphal plays. Do not imagine that Walker

succeeded so well through stealth. His method of publication precluded secrecy, for he issued the plays in parts—one duodecimo sheet every two or three days, four or four and a half sheets per play. The parts sold for a penny each. Part publication was a thriving industry in the second quarter of the 18th century, and Walker appears to have printed more part books in the 1730s and 1740s than any other man. He and his kind for the first time made it possible for the poor to buy many standard works of literature, history, and religion on a kind of instalment plan. This method no doubt benefited the poor; it must also have enabled a poor printer to operate with a minimum quantity of type and the quickest return of the money invested in paper and labor. Walker was his own printer. His first Shakespeare publication consisted of the first sheet of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, which he issued toward the end of August, 1734. Jacob Tonson II, then head of the firm, learnt about this little penny piracy at once, and his reply was the publication of his own edition of *The Merry Wives* on September 6th with an advertisement printed on the last page that reads as follows:

WHEREAS Proposals have been published by one *R. Walker*, for Printing some Plays of *Shakespear*, &c. Weekly, at One Penny each Sheet, which, one with another, will amount to Four Pence each Play; and whereas the said *Walker* has already publish'd Two Sheets of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, in a very Mangled, Imperfect, and Incorrect manner, beyond what has hitherto appear'd in Print. This vile Practice being to the manifest Injury of the Fair-Trader, and to the apparent Loss, if not Ruin, of the Proprietors of the Copy-Right of the said Plays, Notice is hereby given, That each Play so printed by the said *R. Walker*, or any other Person, will be forthwith printed by the Proprietors of the Copy of the same, and the Whole Play exactly Correct, and in all respects bettter [*sic*] printed,

shall be Sold to all *Hawkers* for One Penny each Play,
so long as this vile Practice goes on.

This did not deter Walker, who proceeded calmly to issue, sheet by sheet, all of the Shakespeare plays and the apocryphal plays. Every time he finished five or six plays, he issued a title-page so that they could be bound up in a volume. The whole, when finished, made an eight-volume set. Meanwhile, Tonson kept his promise in every respect but one. Becoming tired of Walker's slow pace, he stepped up his own pace and so finished his edition of the plays well ahead of Walker, who probably finished in March 1735. I cannot here go into the quality of the editions, which was low, or produce more of the advertisements which each publisher from time to time printed on spare pages at the ends of plays. In *his* advertisements, Tonson reviled Walker's editions, called Walker a pirate, and threatened him with an action at law. Walker, on his part, denounced Tonson's unfair practices, poured contempt on his editions, and dared him to bring an action against him in the courts.

The fact is that in this case Tonson did not even apply for a restraining injunction. The reason, as I believe, was that Tonson knew Walker to be determined, and perhaps able, to go through with a chancery case to its final conclusion. This was the last thing that he wanted. He could not be sure how the court would find as to perpetual copyright. Tonson, and the other big proprietors, did not want to risk the loss of their old copyrights so long as, by bluff and bluster, they could maintain the *status quo*. Against a determined man like Walker, who could not be bluffed, Tonson had another weapon. By selling his plays at 1 penny each instead of the four or five pence that Walker charged, Tonson could flood the market and kill Walker's sales. And though Walker stubbornly continued to print the plays till he finished all of them, the undertaking almost ruined him. Never again did he meddle with

Shakespeare except in a small way. Doubtless Tonson on his part suffered even heavier losses, but he could absorb losses, and Walker could not. That Tonson was willing to resort to such methods shows how highly he valued his Shakespeare copyrights.

The punchline of this story about Robert Walker is that commercial rivalry, without the slightest trace of altruism, produced a powerful effect, and this time a good effect. It brought Shakespeare for the first time within the reach of the poor. To be certain of victory, Tonson had to produce his plays in very large editions, and there is good evidence that he did so. At Tonson's discount price, the thirty-seven plays of Shakespeare would have cost 3 shillings and a penny. This outlay, payable at a rate of about twopence a week, was scarcely beyond the abilities of any literate person. I don't want to urge the point too far, but there was a marked increase in the demand for Shakespeare on the stage just about five years after the Tonson-Walker battle of the books, and it is quite possible that there may be here a cause-and-effect relationship.³

Of the three editions published in defiance of Tonson's claims, which I mentioned a while back, Walker's was the first. The second was the 1744 edition of Sir Thomas Hanmer, in six gentlemanly and expensive volumes, published by Oxford University. In Tonson's eyes this publication by the University was a flagrant piracy. But if he felt any itch to tangle with so powerful an adversary in the courts, he endured it with patience. Still he could not let the injury pass unnoticed. What he did do was not dissimilar to his method with Walker. He published in the next year, over his own imprint, a cheap reprint of the Hanmer edition, with a foreword attacking the integrity of the editor.

Walker in 1734; Hanmer in 1744; and in the next year, early in April, another challenge of Tonson's right appeared. Unlike the first two, this new one was nipped in the bud, and

unlike Walker's this one was a mistake rather than a conscious challenge. It took the form of proposals issued by Edward Cave:

Proposals For Printing a New Edition of the Plays of William Shakespear, with Notes Critical and Explanatory, in which The Text will be corrected: The Various Readings remarked: The Conjectures of former Editors examin'd, and their Omissions supply'd. By the Author of the Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of *MACBETH*.

The work was to be printed in ten small volumes at the price of £1 5s. in sheets. Two specimen pages show that the volumes were to be of 18mo format—the first pocket-size edition of the plays. The Proposals formed an appendage to the *Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of Macbeth*—a collection of 46 explanatory notes on the play. They were the work of Samuel Johnson. That his name appears neither in the Proposals nor in the title of the *Miscellaneous Observations* reminds us that at the age of thirty-six Johnson was not thought to have achieved an eminence sufficient to be of much benefit to the project commercially. The Proposals proved abortive, for the edition is heard of no more until Boswell wrote of it as follows:

As we do not trace any thing else published by him during the course of this year [1745], we may conjecture that he was occupied entirely with that work. But the little encouragement which was given by the publick to his anonymous proposals for the execution of a task which Warburton was known to have undertaken, probably damped his ardour.⁴

Boswell calls this a conjecture, and I think it was a mistaken conjecture. There is good reason for doubting that Johnson proceeded further with the proposed edition of Shakespeare after the publication of the prospectus. On the 11th or 12th of April, 1745, Edward Cave received the following letter from Jacob Tonson III:

Sir, I have seen a proposal of yours for printing an edition of Shakespear, which I own much surprized me; but I suppose you are misled by the edition lately printed at Oxford, and that you think it is a copy any one has a right to; if so, you are very much mistaken, and if you call on me any afternoon about four or five o'clock, I doubt not I can shew you such a title as will satisfy you, not only as to the original copy, but likewise to all the emendations to this time: and I will then give you my reasons why we rather chuse to proceed with the University by way of reprisal for their scandalous invasion of our right, than by law, which reasons will not hold good as to any other persons who shall take the same liberty. As you are a man of character, I had rather satisfy you of our right by argument than by the expence of a Chancery suit, which will be the method we shall take with any one who shall attack our property in this or any other copy that we have fairly bought and paid for. I am, Sir, your very humble servant,

JACOB TONSON.⁵

If Cave accepted Tonson's invitation, I imagine that the title which Tonson showed him consisted of assignments, of 1707 and 1709, by which his great-uncle, the first Jacob Tonson, bought for £240, from the heirs of Henry Herringman and others, about 500 copyrights, including almost all of Shakespeare's plays. Perhaps Tonson's letter alone was enough to scare Cave off. To the ordinary commercial risks involved in the publication of a ten-volume edition of Shakespeare Cave might well be reluctant to add the risk of costly litigation with the Tonson firm. We may therefore assume, as Birkbeck Hill did, that it was Tonson's letter or a conference between the two men that led to Cave's abandonment of the Shakespeare project.

In 1756 Johnson's *Dictionary* had appeared, and his reputation was established; it is not surprising then to find that when new proposals for an edition of Shakespeare to be edited by him were put out in that year, it was the Tonson firm that

issued them. It was the Tonson firm that finally published the edition in 1765.

Here is one of the clearest illustrations of the kind of influence publishers have exerted on the editorial history of Shakespeare. Had it not suited Tonson's notion of his own interests to interfere, the world might have had the benefit of Dr. Johnson's Shakespeare some ten or fifteen years sooner than it did. But—someone will say—did not Johnson mature in that time and so give us a better edition than he would have done earlier? I'm not sure. Perhaps the celebrated Preface of 1765 was beyond the Johnson of 1745. But so far as the 1745 *Miscellaneous Observations on . . . Macbeth* give us a basis for judgment, Johnson improved very little between 1745 and 1765 as textual critic or explicator of Shakespeare. Most of the emendations recommended in 1745 are again recommended in 1765. Most of the 1745 notes are carried over, dot and comma, to annotate the 1765 edition.

In 1767 Jacob Tonson III died, and in 1774 the finding of the House of Lords in the case of *Donaldson v. Becket* was that the Copyright Statute of 1710 had put an end to perpetual copyright. The Tonson firm and its associates had been batten- ing on Shakespeare through bluff alone. In the decades fol- lowing this decision, publishers freely competed for the patron- age of a public newly affluent and increasingly eager to wor- ship at the shrine of Shakespeare. Editions of every size and shape rolled off the presses of London, Birmingham, Berwick, Edinburgh, Dublin, and, in 1795, Philadelphia. They came in ponderous quarto volumes, sumptuously illustrated, in pocket- size 18mos, in single-volume editions, in editions in 21 volumes, in variorum editions loaded with notes and prolegomena. In the first quarter of the 19th century four editions or issues were, on the average, published each year.

In the first decade of that century a new method of printing became commercially feasible—a method, that was to reduce

the cost of popular authors like Shakespeare to an indiscriminating public. This method was stereotype. It consisted of the making of *papier mâché* moulds from ordinary formes of hand-set types, from which, in turn, were cast type-metal plates that served for the actual presswork in place of the original hand-set types. The advantage lay in the fact that a number of stereotypes could be made from one setting of type, and these, being light in weight and small in bulk, could easily be stored for future use. It was even possible to make alterations in stereotypes, or to cut them up and rearrange the type-pages to produce different formats without resetting the type. There was, theoretically, almost no limit to the mileage that could be obtained from one setting of type by this new method. In practice, printers realized that the demand for a single edition of a work was not going to be perpetual, and for that reason they presumably made only a small number of stereotypes from each forme of handset type, and the result of this practice was that successive issues showed increased wear and a perceptible lowering of quality.

Nevertheless, many editions of Shakespeare in the 19th century went on for years—one setting of type reproduced again and again, with perhaps new title-pages, new imprints, new illustrations, new preliminary matter, even new formats. In short, publishers were dressing up old and sometimes shoddy wares in new and attractive packages and foisting them on a gullible public. A brief account of one of these long-lived editions will illustrate the method.

In Philadelphia, in 1823, there appeared a small 12mo edition, in eight volumes, with a title that read,

The plays of William Shakspeare, accurately printed from the Text of the Corrected Copy left by the late George Steevens, Esq. with Glossarial Notes, and a Sketch of the Life of Shakspeare. . . . Philadelphia: Published by H. C. Carey, and I. Lea, and M'Carty & Davis. 1823.

Now in fact, this little edition was not printed from any copy left by the late George Steevens; it was printed from the first edition of Alexander Chalmers, London, 1805, which was printed from the 1803 Steevens edition, in Twenty-one volumes. We can scarcely call Chalmers an editor, for he gave himself almost no trouble over the text. All he did was send the Steevens text to the printer and furnish a brief biographical sketch, compiled from Steevens, Malone, and old Nicholas Rowe. Also Chalmers printed a selection of Steevens's numerous, lengthy, and informative explanatory notes, cutting severely those that he selected. The 1823 Carey and Lea edition prints a selection of Chalmers's notes, reducing them to single words, or two or three or, at most, half a dozen words. One example of the result will illustrate, not unfairly, the quality of the Carey and Lea glosses. In a long note on "no black envy Shall make my grave" (*Henry VIII*, II.i.85-6), Steevens supplies the paraphrase, "no action expressive of malice shall conclude my life". He then appends a weak suggestion that "make my grave" could mean *close my grave*, i.e. *terminate my life*". Chalmers's condensed version retains both of these elements. Carey and Lea explain nothing by their bare gloss of "make" as "*close*." Chalmers's scissors-and-paste biographical sketch is, in the Carey and Lea edition, cut with comparable skill. One method of saving words is the dropping of all qualifying phrases. Chalmers writes of Shakespeare that "he appears to have been . . . placed, according to Mr. Malone's opinion, in the office of some country attorney, or the seneschal of some manor court. . . ." This Carey and Lea reduce to the bald statement that he was "placed in the office of some country attorney." Similarly they state flatly that Shakespeare "was twenty-two Years of age when he arrived in London." And again, "He died on his birth-day . . . April 23, 1616."—both, of course, pure conjecture.

The harm done by the biographical inaccuracies and the

glossarial debasement in such a pretty little gift edition as this of 1823 was, cannot be supposed very great. But the sequel is interesting. In the following year, 1824, this little 12mo edition underwent a strange transformation. By cutting up and rearranging the stereotypes, the original Philadelphia publishers produced a two-volume octavo edition printed in double columns. Though in a different format, it was printed from the same setting of type as the little eight-volume 12mo set and must therefore be called the same edition. After that, the same Philadelphia firm reissued the edition in 1828, 1831, 1837, and 1850. About that time the firm, now known as McCarty and Davis, appears to have sold the stereotypes to the Hartford, Connecticut firm of Silus Andrus, whose imprint appears on issues of 1852, '53, '54, and '56. Finally, in 1878 and 1879, issues were published with the New York imprint of P. F. Collier. The impressions of this wretched edition that I have listed are those to be found on the shelves of the Folger Library. I have never looked for them elsewhere, but if I ever do it is a virtual certainty that I shall find other issues, perhaps with the imprints of other firms. I have not quite finished the story yet. The first publishers, let me remind you, were Carey and Lea, McCarty and Davis, of Philadelphia, who published editions from 1823 to 1850. In 1828 there appeared a new but identical edition, published in New York by W. Borradaile. I have to qualify the word "identical." The Borradaile edition is a new setting of type, a fresh start. But, so far as I have been able to discover, this new edition, which I designate Edition B, is as exact a type-facsimile as could be produced—page-for-page, line-for-line, word-for-word. I suppose there are errors, but I haven't found any. It is possible that the Philadelphia firm of McCarty and Davis sold to Borradaile the right to reprint their edition. On the whole, I think it more probable that Borradaile appropriated it without leave asked or given. However that may be, this second or B edition was the progenitor of a second branch

of the family—more prolific, more vigorous, and longer-lived than the A branch. In 1829 the B edition appeared with the New York imprint of J. and J. Harper. I am not going to enumerate all the imprints and dates. The B stereotypes appear to have been sold in 1829 to the Hartford firm of Silus Andrus, who issued the edition every year, sometimes twice or thrice a year, until 1837. In 1838 it turns up in New York, in 1843 and 1849 in Philadelphia. From 1850 to 1852 it was issued in Boston. In 1855 it went back home to New York, where it remained until its last recorded appearance, in 1892. Of these two editions combined the Folger Library possesses thirty-six different imprints. There are probably many more. I do not know any way by which we could estimate the size of the individual editions. But considering the fifty-nine year life of the family, it is not altogether improbable that the misbegotten, illegitimate progeny that issued forth from the union of Carey and Lea in 1823 were more numerous, all together, than any other family of Shakespeare texts ever produced anywhere.

NOTES

1. The amounts paid to Rowe, Pope, and other editors, "taken from the books of the late Mr. Tonson," are recorded by Steevens in his 1778 edition of Shakespeare, volume I, p. 238. Tonson's books have vanished.

2. It is difficult to avoid measuring the work of an eighteenth-century editor against the standards of one's own time. Yet essentially what we complain of in Pope is that he was applying to Shakespeare standards of a later century. Where plays were concerned he (and not improbably Shakespeare before him) would have been unable to understand the sanctity now felt to reside in a text just as the author left it—the bad or obscure lines along with the good. And we have to consider that Tonson was at the expense of employing an eminent poet to do a poet's work, not mainly to perform mechanical tasks which he could have had at a lower rate.

3. G. E. Dawson, "Robert Walker's editions of Shakespeare," in *Studies in the English Renaissance Drama*, ed. Josephine Waters Bennett and others (New York University Press, 1959), pp. 58-81.

4. *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, ed. Hill and Powell (1934-50), volume I, p. 175.

5. Samuel Pegge, *Anonymiana* (1809), p. 34.

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