Never before imprinted

Lukas Erne welcomes a masterly account of Shakespeare's printed history.

Every once in a while, a new study is published whose usefulness is so obvious and its interest such that one can only wonder why no one else has attempted to fill the gap before. Andrew Murphy's *Shakespeare in Print* is a case in point. It offers no less than the first-ever history of Shakespeare publishing and editing from the late 16th to the early 21st century.

Murphy devotes two chapters to each of the four centuries his history covers. Chapters 1 and 2 address the early quartos (from the 1595 *Venus and Adonis* to *Restoration acting editions*) and the early collected editions (from the First Folio of 1623 to the Fourth Folio of 1685). Chapters 3 and 4 are devoted to the 18th century, what Murphy calls the 'Tonson era' (after the family who dominated Shakespeare publishing), which witnessed 'the birth of the editor' as well as the emergence of sophisticated theoretical engagement with the editing of secular texts. One chapter charts the progress of editorial invention from Nicholas Rowe's *Works* of 1709 to William Warburton's of 1747, the other from Samuel Johnson's *Plays* of 1765 to Edmund Malone's *Plays and Poems* of 1790. The 19th century led to a genuine explosion in Shakespeare publishing (on average a new complete edition appeared every six weeks throughout the century!). Murphy does justice to this development by devoting a chapter each to popular and to scholarly editions published during this century. The final two chapters and the conclusion on '21st-century Shakespeares' brings the story up to date, tracing the rise of the *New Bibliography* promulgated by a triumvirate of friends, W. W. Greg, R. B. McKerrow, and A. W. Pollard, as well as noting its interrogation in recent times.

To this survey of four centuries of (chiefly English) Shakespeare editing and publishing, Murphy, at the centre of his study, adds another three chapters which considerably enlarge and complicate the picture. As Murphy shows, in the 18th century Shakespeare publishing was intimately related to copyright disputes in England and in Ireland and Scotland, leading to the House of Lords ruling of 1774 which abolished perpetual copyright and turned Shakespeare's texts into public property, resulting in a significant rise in Shakespeare's popularity. The final chapter is devoted to 'American editions', ranging from the first complete edition of 1795 to Norton's repackaging of *The Oxford Complete Works* in 1997. Murphy's study is usefully completed by a detailed 'Chronological appendix', listing all single-text Shakespeare volumes published up to 1709, all complete works up to 1821, and other significant editions published after these dates.

It is easy to imagine what a study of this kind would have become in less able hands, a *catalogue raisonné* dutifully discussing one edition after another. Yet Murphy's grasp of his material is such that he knows when to slow down and when to speed up, how best to synthesise material some of which is already well-known, and how to endow this synthesis with compelling new insights. In particular, the broad perspective Murphy adopts allows him to shed light where others have been reluctant to tread, on popular editions, on editions published far from London, prepared by publishers with commercial motives rather than by scholarly editors. The convincing demonstration that these editions have had a significant impact on the reception of Shakespeare may well form the basis for much future work. In particular, Murphy shows that while many Shakespeareans have recently investigated 18th-century editing from Rowe to Malone, the often more anonymous textual reproduction of Shakespeare in the following century deserves, but has not yet received, similar study.

Andrew Murphy is having it both ways. Not content to produce an indispensable reference work, he has simultaneously written an immensely entertaining narrative that makes for compulsive reading. The acrimonious disputes between Pope and Theobald, and Steevens and Malone; the Collier forgeries; Thomas and Henrietta Bowdler's pietistic expurgations; the obscene notes on bawdy Shakespearean puns which Steevens mischievously attributed to two highly respectable clergymen - these and many other episodes Murphy brings alive with an enviable lightness of touch, making *Shakespeare in Print* not only the authoritative scholarly history of Shakespeare publishing and editing but also a page-turner which many readers will find difficult to put down.