
ERNE, Lukas Christian

DOI: 10.1080/17450918.2018.1496136
Lukas Erne

English Department, University of Geneva, Switzerland

The publication of The New Oxford Shakespeare is a major event in the editorial history of Shakespeare. There are three components to it, adding up to almost 8,000 pages: the one-volume Modern Critical Edition, which contains the plays and poems in modernized spelling; the two-volume Critical Reference Edition with the texts in original spelling; and the Authorship Companion. The New Oxford Shakespeare Online contains the content of the print volumes in digital format and receives no separate treatment in this review. The Complete Alternative Versions, which, at the time of writing, is still in preparation, will contain versions of Shakespeare’s works not included in the Modern Critical Edition.

Although published one year after the Modern Critical Edition, the Authorship Companion (2017) is preliminary to it in that the decisions about the plays’ and poems’ inclusion in and exclusion from the edition depend on and are explained in it. Edited by Gary Taylor and Gabriel Egan, the Authorship Companion is divided into two parts. Part I, devoted to ‘Methods’, opens with Gary Taylor’s ‘Artiginality: Authorship after Postmodernism’, which provides a rationale for authorship attribution studies, in particular as it relates to Shakespeare and early modern drama, and Gabriel Egan’s excellent ‘History of Shakespearean Authorship Attribution’. They are followed by a series of chapters devoted to methodological issues, such as trigram tests (60-66) and the LION collocation test (92-106).

Part 2 contains a series of case studies of which some conclusions are worth quoting here. Concerning the anonymously published domestic tragedy Arden of Faversham, Jack Elliott and Brett
Greatley-Hirsch write that ‘It is impossible to reconcile the results we have found with a belief that Shakespeare had no hand’ in it, and so Arden ‘takes its rightful place in the canon of his works’ (181). MacDonald P. Jackson’s tests on the same play ‘unequivocally classifies scenes 4-9 … as Shakespeare’s’ (193). In their analysis of the authorship of 3 Henry VI, John Burrows and Hugh Craig come to the conclusion that ‘there is much here to indicate that Marlowe is the author of the non-Shakespeare parts’ (i.e. 1.1-2, 2.3, 3.3, 4.2-9, and 5.2) ‘and little to indicate the contrary’ (217). Three scholars agree with the view that Shakespeare wrote or at least contributed to the additions to Thomas Kyd’s The Spanish Tragedy, first published in 1602. Hugh Craig holds that the additions ‘fit well with the Shakespeare pattern’ in terms of his ‘regular style as represented in the function words’ (245). Gary Taylor arrives at the conclusion that ‘it seems reasonable, at this point, to identify the Additions published in 1602 as the collaborative work of [Thomas] Heywood and Shakespeare’ (260). And John V. Nance argues that Shakespeare ‘is more likely than any other author to have written the Painter’s Part in Addition IV’ (276). To these arguments about Shakespeare’s authorship of additions to a play by another playwright should be added Taylor and Doug Duhaime’s argument that the Fly Scene (3.2) in Titus Andronicus, absent from the quartos (1594, 1600, 1611) but present in the Folio (1623), is in fact an addition by another playwright to Shakespeare’s play: their investigation ‘proves’, they write, ‘that Shakespeare cannot have written the scene, and all the tests point to a single alternative Jacobean candidate’ (67): Thomas Middleton.

Another play that receives sustained attention thanks to Middleton is All’s Well that Ends Well. Rory Loughnane argues that Shakespeare did not write the play collaboratively with Middleton, as Laurie Maguire and Emma Smith proposed a few years ago, but that Middleton added ‘new material to All’s Well that Ends Well, most likely as a revival for the King’s Men after Shakespeare’s death at some point between 1616 and the setting of the Folio’ (320). John V. Nance arrives at results that ‘suggest Middleton as the author of [the king’s speech in] All’s Well 2.3.117-30’ (336), and Gary Taylor adds that ‘beyond a reasonable doubt … Middleton added material to 1.1, 2.3, and 4.3 of Shakespeare’s original play’ (365).

Finally, two scholars turn to Double Falsehood, the early eighteenth-century play by Lewis Theobald, whose relationship to the lost play Cardenio, which the stationer Humphrey Moseley
assigned to John Fletcher and Shakespeare in 1653, has been much explored in recent times. Marina Tarlinskaja’s analysis of the versification of *Double Falsehood* ‘suggests’, she writes, ‘that what Theobald had in his possession was not the original Jacobean manuscript but a later, post-Restoration rewrite, possibly by Davenant’, and so *Double Falsehood*, she concludes, ‘seems to contain three layers from different times: Shakespeare-Fletcher, Davenant, and Theobald’. ‘The original text’, she adds, ‘was probably the lost *Cardenio*’ (406). Giuliano Pascucci concludes his analysis by claiming that ‘the possibility that Theobald forged *Double Falsehood* is eliminated. Theobald had a manuscript of a play containing contributions by Shakespeare and Fletcher, as many studies have shown, and, we believe, contributions by Massinger too. The likeliest explanation, then, is that Theobald had a manuscript of the lost play *Cardenio*’ (416).

What is striking about these case studies is the confidence with which the conclusions are presented, even when the sample is small (the Fly Scene is 84-lines long) or when the extant play (*Double Falsehood*) is argued to be an eighteenth-century rewrite of a late seventeenth-century rewrite of the play to which Shakespeare contributed (*Cardenio*). Even if we grant that significant advances have been made in authorship attribution studies (and this reviewer certainly does), such confidence may nonetheless seem surprising. At the end of his chapter on the authorship of two poems – ‘When God was pleas’d’ and ‘Shall I die’ – that were attributed to Shakespeare in manuscript, Gary Taylor writes: ‘Until we have better tools, readers must simply make up their own minds. Or perhaps, preferably, refuse to make up their minds’ (230). Yet elsewhere in the volume, there is little such commendable reluctance to jump to firm conclusions, including by Taylor himself.

One consequence of the confidence with which new authorship attributions are made and embedded in editions is the short-lived nature of authorial canons in supposedly authoritative editions. In 2007, Taylor and his fellow editors innovated by including *Macbeth* and *Measure for Measure* in the Oxford *Collected Works* of Thomas Middleton on the grounds that Middleton revised and added to these plays after Shakespeare’s death. That decision already seems outdated now if Middleton also revised and added to *Titus Andronicus* and *All’s Well that Ends Well*, which means that not just the former two but all four plays should have been included in the *Collected Works* of Middleton. If the field continues to evolve at a similar pace, then some of the conclusions now embedded in *The New
Oxford Shakespeare will no doubt be superseded soon. Gary Taylor is aware of this and calls The New Oxford Shakespeare ‘an exploratory embodiment of research in progress’ (Modern Critical Edition, p. iv). If so, we may wonder whether this exploration in progress needed to be published in four hard-back volumes selling for £295, or whether a digital archive that could be updated every time research leads to new insights and convictions would have done the job.

The last chapter in the Authorship Companion is at the same time the longest: Gary Taylor and Rory Loughnane’s ‘Canon and Chronology of Shakespeare’s Works’ extends to almost 200 pages. No fully argued Shakespeare chronology had been undertaken since Taylor’s in the Textual Companion (1987) to the Oxford Shakespeare Complete Works (1986), so it may be worthwhile mentioning some of its noteworthy features. The chronology now starts in 1588 (Oxford Shakespeare: 1590/91), with Shakespeare writing The Two Gentlemen in Verona in 1588, contributing to Arden of Faversham later in the same year, and composing Titus Andronicus (with George Peele) in 1589. He contributes to 2 and 3 Henry VI (written with Marlowe and an unidentified playwright) in 1590 and Edward III (also with an unidentified playwright) in 1592, and writes single-handedly The Taming of the Shrew (1591) and Richard III (1592). It is perhaps surprising that Shakespeare, arriving in the intensely collaborative theatre industry of his time, should have started with a sole-authored play before writing several others collaboratively, but it is hardly impossible. Nor can we be sure that Shakespeare did not begin his career as a playwright with collaborative work that simply has not survived.

After the narrative poems, Venus and Adonis (1593) and The Rape of Lucrece (1594), and the re-opening of the theatres, Shakespeare, according to Taylor and Loughnane’s chronology, becomes very busy indeed, writing The Comedy of Errors, Love’s Labour’s Lost, ‘Love’s Labour’s Won’, Richard II, Romeo and Juliet, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, King John, and The Merchant of Venice from mid-1594 to the end of 1596, while also producing, in 1595, ‘revised version of all three Henry VI plays’, thereby ‘creating a unified tetralogy for the Chamberlain’s Men’ (517).[The Merchant of Venice is in fact dated ‘1596’ on p. 484 but ‘early 1597’ on p. 522, probably the result of a late change of mind.] That makes for a very busy two-and-a-half years, with a total of eleven plays, eight original and three revisions.
‘Love’s Labour’s Won’ is one of the plays Taylor and Loughnane claim Shakespeare wrote during this period, although it is in fact unlikely that a now lost play of that title existed, despite the title’s mention in Francis Meres’s *Palladis Tamia* (1598) and in a bookseller’s catalogue of 1603. That a playbook was so popular as to be read out of existence and yet did not receive a second edition seems unlikely. That a play by Shakespeare from his Lord Chamberlain’s Men years failed to be included in the First Folio seems even less likely. That both happened to one and the same play is so unlikely as to stretch credulity to breaking point. There is a simple and far more plausible alternative: *Much Ado about Nothing* was written early enough to have been known to Meres before September 1598, when *Palladis Tamia* was entered in the Stationers’ Register. The play was published in 1600, so well before ‘Love’s Labour’s Won’ – which seems to have been an alternative title for it – was mentioned in a bookseller’s catalogue in 1603. The bookseller’s catalogue also used alternative titles elsewhere, referring to Thomas Heywood’s *Edward IV* as ‘Jane Shore’. Taylor and Loughnane argue that ‘No other comedy by Shakespeare survives from the period before 1598 to which the title could be applied’ (511), yet they date *Much Ado* to ‘mid- to late 1598’ and argue against 1597 as its date of composition (as recently proposed by Douglas Bruster and Geneviève Smith) because of ‘the play’s absence from Meres’s list’ (524), seemingly unaware of the circularity of their reasoning. Independently of whether *Much Ado* was written in 1597 or early 1598, it is thus likely to be the play Meres referred to as ‘Love’s Labour’s Won’, which means there is no need to add the play to Shakespeare’s busy schedule from 1594 to 1596. As this example suggests, Shakespeare’s canon and chronology are topics on which scholars will no doubt continue to disagree.

The *Modern Critical Edition* presents the plays and poems in chronological order. The table of contents is to a surprising extent an unfamiliar one. Apart from the thirty-six First Folio plays and *Pericles* (the traditional dramatic canon), and *Venus and Adonis, The Rape of Lucrece*, the *Sonnets*, *A Lover’s Complaint*, and ‘The Phoenix and the Turtle’ (the traditional poetic canon), it features *Arden of Faversham* (‘by Anonymous and Shakespeare’), *Edward III* (‘by Anonymous and Shakespeare’), ‘Love’s Labour’s Won: A Lost Play’ (or indeed not lost; see above), ‘To the Queen’ (an epilogue written for a court performance in 1599), the poetic miscellany *The Passionate Pilgrim*, ‘by Shakespeare, Barnfield, Griffin, Deloney, Marlowe, Raleigh, and Anonymous’, the 1602 Additions to
The Spanish Tragedy, ‘by Shakespeare (?) and Heywood (?)’, a few ‘Poems attributed to Shakespeare in seventeenth-century miscellanies’, including the famous, or infamous, ‘Shall I die’, ‘The Tragedy of Sejanus: A Lost Version by Jonson and Anonymous (Shakespeare?)’, ‘Sir Thomas More: Additions by Shakespeare’, ‘Fragments of The History of Cardenio, by Fletcher and Shakespeare’ (with ‘everything demonstrably or probably written, or overwritten, by Theobald, Davenant, or Cibber’ [p. 3136] removed from the text of Double Falsehood), and ‘The Two Noble Kinsmen, by Fletcher and Shakespeare’ (vii-viii). Most of these texts are not newcomers to the Shakespeare canon, or at least its fringes, although Sejanus may be an exception. It is known that Sejanus was first performed by the King’s Men in 1603, and in the preface to the 1605 quarto, Jonson points out that he has revised the text, and that ‘a second Pen had good share’ (sig. ¶2v) in the play as it was originally performed. As the company’s in-house dramatist, Shakespeare, it is argued, is more likely than anyone else to have been that ‘second Pen’. The reasoning may be accurate, but whether such possible part-authorship of a lost version should earn the play a place in the table of contents alongside Hamlet and Lear is another question.

As one turns to the plays and poems, what is immediately striking are the pleasantly uncluttered pages on which they are printed. The text appears in one column (not two, as in the 1986 Oxford Shakespeare or the 1998 Arden Shakespeare Complete Works), nor are prose lines much longer than verse lines, as in the 2007 RSC Shakespeare Complete Works. The make-up of the page is aesthetically pleasing, and even though the paper is naturally rather thin, it is not too thin to allow for manuscript annotation.

As for the make-up of a typical page, the main text naturally takes up the greatest amount of space. Below it, in smaller print, is a two-column glossary, an improvement over the 1986 Oxford Shakespeare, which contained none, although the level of glossing seems at times uneven: the first 23 lines of The Taming of the Shrew, for instance, receive 40 glosses, whereas the first 70 lines of The Comedy of Errors have 27. To the right of the main text, in a slim separate column, appear what the editors call ‘Performance Notes’, whose purpose it is ‘to call attention to more complex staging possibilities’ (47) than those embedded in the stage directions of the main text. Many of these notes seem rather arbitrary. At one point in scene 2 of Edward III, ‘Lodowick may follow King Edward to
another part of the stage where they both sit’ (491). When he enters in 4.2 of *Henry V*, Grandpré ‘may gesture towards the English camp’ (1582). Indeed, they may. At some point in 3.1 of *The Tempest*, ‘Miranda ‘may or may not seem particularly troubled over disobeying her father’ (3104). Indeed, she may or may not. Much virtue in ‘may’. Nor is it clear what exactly the relationship is between the stage directions that have been editorially inserted into the text, between square brackets, and the ‘performance options’ further to the right. During the Balcony Scene, for instance, once Juliet has left the stage, a stage direction between square brackets tells us that ‘Romeo begins to leave’, while further to the right, keyed to the same passage, in the ‘Performance Notes’ column, we are told that ‘Romeo may begin to leave’ (1026). The problem is not just that this is contradictory but that it leaves the reader guessing as to how inserted stage directions relate to the ‘Performance Notes’. Another example of the uncertainty over what exactly the ‘Performance Notes’ are meant to achieve appears in *Hamlet*, 4.4, a scene with the King and Laertes. Keyed to lines 106-18, in which the King addresses Laertes, a ‘performance note’ tells us that ‘This can be interpreted as a reflection of the Queen’s new coldness towards him’ (2078). But the Queen is not on stage, and so it is not clear how the note is supposed to throw light on how this passage could be performed. In that sense, it is not a ‘performance note’ at all but a readerly interpretation.

A key question many earlier editions grappled with is which text to choose when more than one early version of a play has come down to us: the ‘best’ early witness? a conflation of the early witnesses? the version that is perceived to reflect most closely Shakespeare’s original intentions? the version that is perceived to reflect most closely how the play was performed? *The New Oxford Shakespeare* adopts none of these rationales. Instead, the version included in the *Modern Critical Edition* is that of the longest early witness, so for instance the second quarto of *Hamlet*, not the Folio, and this not on the grounds of perceived quality but simply length. Where there are shorter, alternative versions, they will appear in the *Complete Alternative Versions* volume. The tendency to offer more rather than less, longer rather than shorter, and several rather than one, thus refusing to choose (or inviting readers to choose), is also in evidence in other features. *The New Oxford Shakespeare* offers us Shakespeare’s complete works not once (the *Modern Critical Edition*…) but twice (… and the *Critical Reference Edition*). The edited versions are those with the longest text (the *Modern Critical*
Edition and the Critical Reference Edition) but also all the others (the Complete Alternative Versions).

The same logic seems to have informed the choice of some of the speech headings. Whereas earlier editors wondered whether to call the character ‘Shylock’, as some early speech headings have it, or ‘the Jew’, as other early speech headings have it, he is called ‘Shylock the Jew’ in the New Oxford Shakespeare. The same with Edgar’s bastard brother Edmund, variously called ‘Bastard’ and ‘Edmund’ in early speech headings, now called ‘Bastard Edmund’. This refusal to choose when there are two options also finds its way into the table of contents, where the title of Arden of Faversham is given as ‘The Tragedy of M. Arden of Faversham; or, The Tragedy of M. Arden of Fevershame’. There might have been a more economical way of conveying the place name’s suggestive spelling, ‘Fevershame’, in the early editions.

A disappointing feature of the Modern Critical Edition is the absence of introductions to the individual plays and poems. Instead, each text is preceded by a series of short excerpts from its reception history, what we are told to think of as ‘tapas Shakespeare’ (iv). I find this a lazy solution, and the excuse we are offered for it, namely that the editors do not wish to ‘impose [their] own favourite theories, methods, or interpretations’ (iv), seems unconvincing. Why not use the introductions to alert readers to some of the key questions the texts raise, allowing them to engage with the plays and poems with heightened critical awareness while also encouraging them to make up their own minds? What makes the ‘tapas Shakespeare’ introductions particularly unsatisfactory is that the sources of the excerpts are not identified by page number, so if students are stimulated by a passage and would like to follow up on it, there is often no easy way of doing so. Alas, poor students.

The Critical Reference Edition, remarkably, is ‘the first-ever critical edition of Shakespeare’s complete works in their original spelling and punctuation with a textual introduction for each work and a full textual apparatus on the page’ (Modern Critical Edition, 54), and thus fills an obvious gap. The first volume, which opens with a lucid introduction and an incisive essay on ‘Shakespeare and the Kingdom of Error’, both by John Jowett, contains the plays and poems whose copy texts date from Shakespeare’s lifetime, in chronological order of their printing (or, in the case of manuscripts, inscription), from Arden of Faversham (1592) to the Sonnets (1609). The second volume contains the works with posthumous copy texts, from The Tempest (the first play in the First Folio) to Cardenio as
adapted as *Double Falsehood* (1728). The dense textual introductions include, where relevant, a ‘Musical Introduction’, by John Cunningham, and information about ‘Roles and Requirements’, by Andrew J. Power: the number of actors needed, doubling options, stage properties used, and immensely useful charts with all the characters of a play, their variant designations in speech prefixes and stage directions, indications of who appears in which scene, and the percentage their lines account for in the overall play. Many of the textual introductions amount to real treasure-troves, so it is a shame that the *Critical Reference Edition* has no index, which would have enhanced its usefulness for future research.

The actual text of the *Critical Reference Edition* is provided with copious textual annotation at the foot of the page and short discursive textual notes in the right hand margin (called ‘Marginal Notes’, 540), of which many are about press variants: e.g., ‘Some copies read “figures” for “figure”’ (824); ‘Some copies read “seife” for “selfe”’ (1467). The pride of place thus granted to press variants is all the more surprising as they are also mentioned in separate tables in the textual introductions. Other marginal notes repeat information available in the textual notes at the foot of the same page. For instance, in Act 1 Scene 3 of *1 Henry IV*, next to line 244, which reads ‘Zbloud, when you and he came backe from Rauenspurgh.’, a Marginal Note reads: ‘JAGGARD omits “Zbloud”’ (559), while a couple of inches further down on the same page, a collation note provides the same information. There are literally hundreds of such duplications of information. As in the *Modern Critical Edition*, the use made of the right-hand column was thus meant to be innovative but turns out to be of limited usefulness.

Despite these caveats, *The New Oxford Shakespeare* has the merit of forcing us to reconsider our convictions. Like the *Oxford Shakespeare* of 1986 on which it builds and which it supersedes, *The New Oxford Shakespeare* is sometimes frustrating but often thought-provoking, an inevitable starting point for much editorial and critical work to come.