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Received Text versus Authentic Text

Late Eighteenth-century Choices in Editing Shakespeare

This paper focuses primarily on the editorial activities of George Steevens and tries to answer the radical change in his editorial theory and practice in his Shakespeare edition of 1793. The two editors who dominated Shakespeare editing from the last third of the eighteenth century to the second half of the nineteenth were George Steevens and Edmond Malone, both of them working in the Johnsonian tradition. They also collaborated on a number of Shakespeare editions until the early 1790s, when their new editions became a site of contest. I argue that while Malone stands for the recently established criteria of modern textual scholarship, i.e. the quest to determine the authentic text, the editorial principles of Steevens's 1793 edition embody a recognition of the merits of the received text and the genre best fitting it – the tradition of variorum editing. I suggest that the sudden break may be read as Steevens's attempt to show an alternative to the scholarly editing principles he had helped establish, as well as reinforce the idea that editions are discursive constructs.

The eighteenth century is characterised in the literature as the emergence of a scholarly and theoretically self-conscious tradition of Shakespeare editing.[1] At the heart of this tradition lies Samuel Johnson's Shakespeare edition of 1765. The legacy of this landmark edition lasted for the next fifty years since the two editors who dominated Shakespeare editing from the last third of the eighteenth century to the second half

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1. Simon Jarvis, *Scholars and Gentlemen: Shakespearean Textual Criticism and Representations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Barbara Mowat, "The Reproduction of Shakespeare's Texts," in *Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. Margreta de Grazia and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Andrew Murphy, *Shakespeare in Print: A History and Chronology of Shakespeare Publishing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Gary Taylor*, Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History, from the Restoration to the Present* (New York: Weidenfeld, 1989); Paul Werstine, "Shakespeare" in *Scholarly Editing: A Guide to Research*, ed. D. C. Greetham (New York: Modern Language Association, 1995).

of the nineteenth, George Steevens and Edmond Malone used Johnson's edition as a base text. The first variorum edition (as Johnson's Shakespeare edition of 1765 is often called) generated a number of variorum editions combining the contribution of previous editors and commentators. The first Johnson/Steevens variorum came out in 1773, to be followed by the 1778, 1785 and 1793 editions of Samuel Johnson, George Steevens, and Isaac Reed, culminating in the monumental twenty-one volume edition, in the so called fifth variorum, published in 1803. Edmond Malone published his edition in 1790 which grew into in the equally twenty-one volume Boswell/Malone variorum of 1821 completed by James Boswell after Malone's death.[2]

Steevens and Malone also collaborated on a number of Shakespeare editions. Malone contributed notes, corrections and his groundbreaking chronology to Steevens's 1778 edition, and in 1780 he published two supplementary volumes (Supplement) to Steevens's 1778 edition. As Andrew Murphy notes "Malone's conception of the Shakespearean editorial process was moulded, in the first instance, in work that he undertook under Steevens's auspices."[3] Malone thanked Steevens in his Supplement (1780) for Steevens's commentary on the plays and sonnets, and Steevens also contributed a few notes to Malone's 1790 edition.[4]

The cooperation ended when the 1793 Steevens edition came out as a reply to Malone's Shakespeare edition published in 1790, and Steevens directly attacked Malone's editorial principles. Malone in turn charged Steevens with rejecting the earlier editing principles they both shared. While Malone's 1790 edition is considered to be "the greatest momentum of eighteenth century Shakespearean scholarship" (Walsh), whose editorial work Margreta de Grazia identified as a paradigm shift marking the rupture in the editorial tradition that separates today's editions from the ones preceding him,[5] the 1793 Steevens edition is seen as an edition ruining Steeven's reputation as a textual critic.[6]

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2. Andrew Murphy, *Shakespeare in Print: A History and Chronology of Shakespeare Publishing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 323–352 (chronological appendix).

3. Murphy, p. 94.

4. See Arthur Sherbo's and Peter Martin's entry on George Steevens and Edmond Malone respectively in the *Dictionary of National Biography*'s online database.

5. Marcus Walsh, *Arguments of Wit and Sense: Eighteenth-Century Literary Editing and the Problem of Textual Knowledge* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 2000), p. 12. Margreta de Grazia, *Shakespeare Verbatim: The Reproduction of Authenticity and the 1790 Apparatus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 6.

6. *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature in 18 Volumes (1907–21)*, Volume V: The Drama to 1642, Part One, "XI. The Text of Shakespeare," ed. A. W. Ward, A. R.

As Andrew Murphy observes "Steevens's clash with Malone represents, in a sense, the final collision of two different visions of textual scholarship, as the century drew to a close."[7] Following this line of thought I argue that while Malone stands for the recently established criteria of modern textual scholarship, the quest to determine the authentic text, the editorial principles of Steevens in his 1793 edition embody a recognition of the merits of the received text and the genre best fitting it, the tradition of variorum editing.

There is a consensus in the literature that both editors contributed to the creation of modern scholarly editing in the late eighteenth century characterised by a systematic collation of recent editions with the early prints (the First Folio and the early quartos), a strong sense of historicity, a reliance on documentary evidence and on the literature of Shakespeare's age, all in the Johnsonian fashion. Their editorial principles postulated a belief in scientific objectivity and method resulting, in Malone's words, in "true explication." Steevens had followed the same principles from the 1760s to the early 1790s and as Nick Groom notes in his introduction to the reprint of the Johnson/Steevens variorum (1995) Steevens's 1778 edition established "the canons of modern critical method and literary-historical editing."[8]

Steevens's rift with Malone in the 1790s, his preference for the Second Folio, for more emendations, a more poetic and interpretative approach as described by Joanna Gondris, Nick Groom and Andrew Murphy may be read as Steevens showing an alternative to the scholarly editing principles he had helped to establish.[9] This playfulness with editorial principles would certainly fit the profile of the "Puck of Commentators" who is mostly remembered for his hoaxes, mistakes and fabrication of sources as Arthur Sherbo remarks.[10]

Therefore instead of interpreting the break with his earlier principles as an orthodoxy I suggest to see Steevens's return to the tradition of the received text as an

Waller, W. P. Trent, J. Erskine, S.P. Sherman, and C. Van Doren (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons; Cambridge: CUP, 1907–21) <http://www.bartleby.com/215/1118.html>; date of acquisition: 21 September 2006.

7. Murphy, p. 94.

8. Nick Groom, "Introduction," in *The Plays of William Shakespeare* [in ten volumes, with the two supplementary volumes of Edmond Malone, published in 1780], Vol. 1 (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1995), p. v.

9. Joanna Gondris, " 'All This Farrago': The Eighteenth-Century Shakespeare Variorum Page as a Critical Structure," in *Reading Readings: Essays on Shakespeare Editing in the Eighteenth Century* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997).

10. Arthur Sherbo, *The Achievement of George Steevens* (New York: P. Lang, 1990), p. 217.

early alternative to the idealisation of the First Folio as an authentic text. The tradition of the received text allows us to see the various early prints and successive editions as constructs conveying varying interpretations. Paul Werstine commended Margreta de Grazia for observing that the First Folio is a discursive construction since she "concludes that in constituting Shakespeare's canon, the Folio and its preliminaries are not be read referentially, that is, as delivering 'information [about the contents of Shakespeare's canon] that is understood to have an existence prior to and independent of its documentation [in the Folio]."[11] Reading Steevens's return to the received text in a constructivist way will show him as an editor grasping something of the difficulties of reading any Shakespeare edition referentially. This way, exhibiting some traces of non-referential reading, Steevens may also find his way into poststructuralist editorial theory.

What are the main differences between the textual visions of Malone and Steevens by 1790? Malone formulates his charges against Steevens in a letter to Percy, fellow Shakespearean, claiming that Steevens,

> after maintaining for near 30 years, that the settlement of the text by a diligent collation of the original copies was a matter of the utmost moment, and that all arbitrary and capricious changes were to be carefully avoided, he on a sudden wheeled round; and finding that by collating the original quartos and the first folio, word for word, I had established a text beyond all controversy, and discovered some 1600 deviations from it, in his and all former editions, he then for the first time maintained, that collation was of no value; that it only served to restore the *blunders* of the ignorant printers and editors of the quartos and folio; that it was impossible Shakespeare should ever have written a line not perfectly smooth and metrical, according to *our* ideas of smoothness and metre; and that therefore, whenever we find a line defective in this particular, we may *add* or *expunge* at pleasure. – Proceeding on this new principle, he has made his last edition the most unfaithful perhaps that has ever appeared.[12]

Steevens is also explicit about the "wheel around": he declares that "it is time instead of a servile and timid adherence to the ancient copies, when (offending against

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11. Paul Werstine, [Book Review on Margreta de Grazia, *Shakespeare Verbatim: The Reproduction of Authenticity and the 1790 Apparatus*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991], in *Shakespeare Quarterly* 45.2 (Summer 1994), p. 232.

12. Groom, p. lxiv.

sense and metre) they furnish no real help, that a future editor, well acquainted with the phraseology of our author's age, should be at liberty to restore some apparent meaning to his corrupted lines, and a decent flow to his obstructed versification."[13] Speaking about the change occurring by 1793 Andrew Murphy notes that Steevens "directly attacked Malone's editorial principles in his "Advertisement" to the edition. Like Capell, Johnson, and indeed Steevens himself in his earlier incarnations, Malone insisted on the priority of the First Folio and he strongly rejected the notion that the Second Folio had any authority. Steevens now reversed his own earlier position, arguing against the elevation of the First Folio and making a case for recognising the merits of the Second."[14]

Steevens "in his earlier incarnations" had valued the early prints, the First Folio and quartos and criticised the practice of earlier editors, such as Nicholas Rowe who as Steevens wrote "did not print from the earliest and most correct, but from the most remote and inaccurate of the four folios."[15] In his 1778 edition Steevens pointed out the problem of not choosing the proper base text and not collating it systematically with the early prints "as every fresh editor continued to make the text of his predecessor the ground-work of his own" and collated only when difficulties occurred and therefore "some deviations from the originals had been handed down."[16] Steevens by systematic collation promised a better result: "the number of which [deviations] are lessened in the impression before us, as it has been constantly compared with the most authentic copies."[17] However, as Murphy observes Steevens had not returned to the early prints as a base text like Edward Capell (1767–8) but followed Johnson's tradition of collating the received text passed down by generations of editors with the early prints.

Andrew Murphy points out that after the rift Steevens also defended eighteenth-century scholarly emendations as opposed to Malone's preference of the First Folio readings. Steevens challenges the authenticity of the First Folio readings when he points out the role of the other actors in the process of textual transmission: "we have sometimes the suggestions of a Warburton, a Johnson, a Farmer, or a Tyrwhitt,

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13. *The Cambridge History.*

14. Murphy, p. 94.

15. Murphy, p. 91.

16. George Steevens, "Advertisement to the Reader," in *The Plays of William Shakespeare* in Ten Volumes with the Corrections and Illustrations of Various Commentators; to which Are Added Notes by Samuel Johnson and George Steevens; The Second Edition, Revised And Augmented (London, 1778), p. 69.

17. Steevens, p. 69.

in preference to the decisions of a Hemings or a Condell, notwithstanding their choice of readings might have been influenced by associates whose high-sounding names cannot fail? to enforce respect, viz. William Ostler, John Shanke, William Sly and Thomas Poope."[18] Moreover both Murphy and Steevens catch Malone sleeping: "Despite his heavy emphasis on what he styled the 'authentic' text, Malone was still willing, like his predecessors, to make a number of silent changes aimed at regularising the text."[19] Steevens notes himself in his 'Advertisement' that in defense of the Second Folio "no stronger plea can be advanced than the frequent use made of it by Mr. Malone."[20]

Questions such as which text to edit and what is the nature of the text to be edited, which is more authentic: a First Folio or a quarto version of a play, what is the hierarchy between the early prints, and the question of the Shakespeare manuscripts are central to the history of Shakespeare editing. It is not surprising that the focal point of both Malone's and Steevens's argument centers around it. Paul Werstine points out that successive editions are inevitably sites of competition as "[e]ach editor stages the contest as if it were between the text made familiar to readers by earlier editors (the received text) and the text about to be presented, which is said to be the one that Shakespeare intended." He continues that "[c]ast in such terms, the process of textual renovation is potentially limitless since there is no documentary record of the plays' genesis or transmission in manuscript, which might fix limits on the idealized author's purposes."[21] This lack of a metaphysical origin results in the construction of an origin by textual theory producing various hypotheses about the nature of the "lost manuscript" like those of the representatives of New Bibliography in the first half of the twentieth century.

However, as Paul Werstine remarks in his article outlining the editorial history of Shakespeare, "until the twentieth century, most editors and textual critics held out little hope of recovering from the early printed versions what Shakespeare actually wrote."[22] Steevens, for example, in his "Advertisement to the Reader" to the 1778 edition was not concerned with the origin of the prints when he proudly asserted that "the text of Shakespeare is restored to the condition in which the author, or rather

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18. Quoted in Murphy, p. 94.
19. Murphy, p. 97.
20. Quoted in Murphy, p. 94.
21. Paul Werstine, "Shakespeare," in *Scholarly Editing: A Guide to Research*, ed. D.C. Greetham (New York: Modern Language Association, 1995), p. 253.
22. Werstine, p. 253.

his first publishers, appear to have left it."[23] The statement of Steevens demonstrates that his, and his contemporaries' focus was laid on the received text, on the way "it was left" to us by Shakespeare or his publishers in its condition(ality).

While, as Barbara Mowat observes, New Bibliography aimed at finding authorial intention and tried to form hypotheses about the lost original manuscript the eighteenth century regarded authorial intentions in a less metaphysical sense.[24] As Stephen Orgel argues it was understood more in terms of authenticity, which was bestowed upon Shakespeare. Orgel suggests that the authorized collection of Shakespeare's plays in 1623 resembles the canonization of the Vulgate by the Council of Trent as "it separated the authentic from the original."[25] The notion of the original is problematic as there are no surviving Shakespearean manuscripts and no evidence that the author oversaw or had full control over the printed edition and yet centuries of scholars bestowed authenticity on the early prints.

One of the fundamental principles of modern textual editing, starting with New Bibliography in the early twentieth century, is to use the early prints, the First Folio of 1623 and the early quartos as copy texts. The presumption is that the closer the text is to the actual production, the more accurately it reflects authorial intentions producing that text. Therefore "printed texts can be arranged into a logical sequence and that the text presumed to be closest to the author's own original has an authority which outweighs that of all other editions."[26] This proposition was first articulated by Samuel Johnson. As Andrew Murphy points out no wonder that a prominent scholar of New Bibliography, R.B. McKerrow hailed Johnson as the scholar "alone of all the early editors . . . to have seen clearly the principles on which textual criticism of printed books must be based."[27]

Despite its claims the Johnsonian editorial tradition followed a different logic. As Murphy notes Johnson did not necessarily follow the principles he articulated and "[t]hough he registered the primacy of the First Folio, he nevertheless did not use it as the foundation for his own edition."[28] Reprints of the First Folio in the sev-

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23. Steevens, p. 70.

24. Barbara Mowat, "The Reproduction of Shakespeare's Texts," in *Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. Margreta de Grazia and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 20.

25. Stephen Orgel, "The Authentic Shakespeare," *Representations* 21 (Winter 1988), p. 5.

26. Murphy, p. 82.

27. Kerrow quoted in Murphy, p. 82.

28. Murphy, p. 83.

enteenth century and eighteenth-century editions are based on the received text, taking part in a cultural transmission and dialogue of successive editions.

The history of the textual transmission is, at least in the eighteenth century, is the history of the received text. The greatest achievements of late eighteenth-century editing, the editions of Steevens and Malone, have a clear line of succession to the First Folio, which was reprinted with variants as the Second, Third and Fourth Folio (published in 1632, 1663–64, and 1685 respectively). As Paul Werstine reminds us the first major eighteenth century editor, Nicholas Rowe marked up a copy of the Fourth Folio in 1709. Alexander Pope based his edition on Rowe, Theobald used Pope's edition. Johnson turned to Theobald's fourth edition of 1757.[29] Steevens used Johnson's, and Malone's 1790 edition relied on the Steevens–Reed edition of 1785. As Simon Jarvis points out Malone used this Steevens edition as a base text and this was collated line by line with the First Folio and those quartos, which Malone regarded as authoritative.[30]

As much as Malone could not fully detach himself from the tradition of the received text Steevens also saw the drawbacks of basing his edition on the received text as he remarked in his Advertisement of 1778: "Mr Rowe did not print from the earliest and most correct, but from the most remote and inaccurate of the four folios."[31] We also find that according to Steevens "the first duty of the editor" is "adhering to the old copies," which is, however, not a return to the early prints as copy texts in the sense of New Bibliography but a principle that requires a collation of these early folio and quarto editions with, in most cases, the most recent edition.

Steevens despite his scornful remark about Rowe did not break with the tradition of the received text even though he was aware of the textual importance of the early prints (as Steevens himself published twenty early quartos from the collection of David Garrick in 1766). His 1793 edition is a marked return to the tradition of the received text because it exhibited some apparent advantages in the cultural transmission of the text, and in its capacity of appropriating Shakespeare to the readers. The received text envelopes a recognition of textual change, the changing sensibilities of readers, and the appreciation of accumulated knowledge of successive scholars.

The form which best reflects the cumulative nature of knowledge in the tradition of the received text is variorum editing. Steevens from the start of his carrier advocated a way of collaborative editing, which meant a reliance not only on the work of

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29. Werstine, p. 256.
30. Jarvis, p. 185.
31. Steevens, p. 68.

previous editors but also on the expertise of the reading public. In issuing a proposal (dated February 1, 1766) to publish yet another Shakespeare edition only a few months after Johnson's Steevens's strongest argument highlighted the importance of the contribution of the public to editing Shakespeare. Steevens claimed had Johnson "met with the assistance he had reason to expect form the Public, in aid of his own great abilities, all further attempts at the illustration of [Shakespeare], had been as unnecessary as vain" and he continued that "[a] perfect edition of the Plays of Shakespeare requires at once the assistance of the Antiquary, the Historian, the Grammarian, and the Poet" and asked the public to direct their contributions to the publisher.[32]

The form which best represents, in the words of Joanna Gondris, the "interpretitive comprehensiveness" of eighteenth-century editing is the variorum edition, the peek of the received text tradition as it collects the best attempts of readings, emendations, conjectures in the practice of collaborative editing.[33] As opposed to individual editing the variorum edition testifies to the belief that the editors' contribution to universal neoclassical knowledge is partial. The sense of completeness, argues Joanna Gondris, is sought to be achieved through the variorum form, in the work of one or two editors, aided by several contributors, who published their editions of Shakespeare *cum notis variorum* containing their own editorial insights and commentary from previous editors.

Johnson's 1765 edition has been characterised as the first variorum edition for two reasons. First, while he recognised the competitive edge of Shakespearean textual commentaries of Pope, Warburton and Theobald as Andrew Murphy notes he also "recognised the value of a great deal of the work produced by his predecessors. For this reason, his edition seeks to provide a 'summation' of the best of that material; he includes in his text the prefaces of Pope, Theobald, Hanmer and Warburton, together with Rowe's 'Life' and as many of his predecessor's notes as he felt were useful to his reader. . ."[34] This type of collaboration is a more diachronic one aiming at a synthesis of Shakespearean textual scholarship preceding him. Yet the collaborative nature of the variorum edition had also taken a more synchronic dimension since George Steevens contributed forty-nine notes to the appendix of Johnson's 1765 edition.[35]

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32. Quoted by Murphy, p. 90.
33. Joanna Gondris, pp. 123–139.
34. Murphy, p. 84.
35. Sherbo, p. 1.

One characteristic of this editorial method was the bulky nature of the editions as a result of the comprehensive reproduction of previous arguments on textual cruces. As Joanna Gondris shows in her study of eighteenth century variora editions, the variorum page triggered mocking reviews already in the 1780s and 1790s. An article from the *English Review* (1784) charged Johnson with engendering this plenitude of commentary and the bulky volumes ensuing from this practice and laments the consequence of it: "Dr. Johnson, from an excess of candour, and perhaps from a diffidence of the industry he had employed upon the subject, adopted a multiplicity of notes from various writers into his edition. Mr Stevens (sic) has carefully preserved all this farrago, and beside it, we are now treated with the annotations of himself, Dr. Farmer, Mr. Tyrwhitt, Mr Malone etc . . . each of them contradicting him that went before him."[36] The accumulation of notes over time grew exponentially: from the 8 volumes of Johnson 1765 to 21 volumes of Johnson–Steevens–Reed 1803 and Malone–Boswell 1821.

The variorum editions of the second half of the eighteenth century, however, are not characterised by the personal rivalry typical of the first half of the century as in the editions of Pope, Theobald and Warburton. The reproduction of previous commentaries in collaborative editing postulates that knowledge is cumulative, therefore it reproduces the process of reaching (or not reaching) a conclusion, facilitating further discussions in the accumulation of our knowledge about the Shakespeare text. Marcus Walsh also argues that the variorum commentary is by no means additive:

> Their methods are based at best on a rigorous dialectic of hypotheses formulation, validation and falsification. That dialectic involves a process of selection of the most pertinent lines of argument, and the most exactly relevant supporting contextual knowledge; what matters is not so much the source of authority – the "voice" – of an argument or of a piece of information, as its hermeneutic cogency and propriety.[37]

Another fundamental characteristic of the variorum is the lack of an exclusively authorial voice. By reproducing contradictory commentaries, by not always reaching a conclusion the modality of the variorum edition is multivocal and the outcome is many times tentative. Steevens in his Advertisement (1778) explicitly states that "When examples in favour of contradictory opinions are assembled, though no at-

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36. Gondris, p. 123.
37. Walsh, p. 15.

tempt is made to decide on either part, such neutral collections should always be regarded as materials for future critics, who may hereafter apply them with success."[38]

Groom's analysis of the debate over the authority of *Pericles* in the *Supplement* of Malone's to the 1778 Steevens variorum also sheds some light on the importance of process, on articulating diverging opinions and the primacy of dialogue to individual decisions (especially in the light of their repeated experience of being wrong in their editorial practice). Malone thought *Pericles* was written by Shakespeare while Steevens disputed its inclusion in the canon. Malone wrote at the end of the commentary that he and Steevens had "set forward with an agreement to maintain the propriety of our respective suppositions relative to this piece, as far as we were able; to submit our remarks, as they gradually increased, alternately to each other, and to dispute the opposite hypothesis, till one of us should acquiesce in the opinion of his opponent, or each remain confirmed in his own."[39]

It seems that the eighteenth-century variorum editor does not assume a position of omniscience. As Arthur Sherbo, the author of the monograph *The Achievement of George Steevens*, points out Steevens could admit "I am dissatisfied with my former explanation;" "in my original attempt to explain this passage, I was completely wrong;" "my conjecture, however, deserves not much attention," and "I can offer no legitimate explanation of this passage."[40] A few of these self-reflective phrases show that Steevens was engaged in a dialogue not only with other editors but also with his own previous editions. The variorum form itself perpetuates the self-reflective commentary. As Joanna Gondris remarks this results in "an extraordinary even-handedness in these notes, a willingness to admit, or even to supply counterevidence to an editor's own reading."[41] This kind of discourse is mostly missing from the editorial tradition we are familiar with, which is more authoritative and result-centred in its practice than today's theorists would like it to be.[42]

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38. Steevens, p. 71.

39. Quoted in Groom, p. lvii.

40. Sherbo, pp. 208–9.

41. Gondris, p. 125.

42. Stephen Orgel provides a very interesting insight to his own editorial practice as a post-modern textual theorist, to the discrepancy between theory and practice. He confesses in his article "What is an Editor?" " I am the first one to admit that my own practice in my Oxford *Tempest* and *Winter's Tale* hasn't done much to take into account my own arguments in "What is a Text?" and the "Authentic Shakespeare," beyond a determination in the commentary to be true to the genuine obscurity, even incomprehensibility of much of the text, and a

This permissiveness to acknowledge alternative hypotheses about Shakespeare, and openly presenting these dilemmas for the reader, however, should not be interpreted as indeterminacy or a complete lack of authorial voice. As Marcus Walsh asks "Must we really, however, celebrate the variorum editing of Johnson, Steevens and Malone as the tragedy of men who could not make up their minds? These late eighteenth century variorums are not inevitably merely additive, or decidedly multivocal."[43] The stance and voice of the editor in assembling the notes of various commentators, and in making textual and interpretative choices is authorial by definition.

Steevens's call for the assistance of the reading public in compiling the notes to his editions of the 1770s might also seem to enhance the multivocal nature of his edition. However, he himself declares in the Advertisement to the edition of 1778 that he has the upper hand in editorial matters: "Mr Steevens desires it may be observed, that he has strictly complied with the terms exhibited in his proposals, having appropriated all such assistances as he received, to the use of the present editor, whose judgement has, in every instance, determined on their respective merits."[44] He firmly asserts his authority by explaining his rationale of rejecting certain notes: "[t]he majority of these were founded on the supposition, that Shakespeare was originally an author correct in the utmost degree, but maimed and interpolated by the neglect or presumption of the players. In consequence of this belief, alterations have been proposed wherever a verse could be harmonized, an epithet exchanged for one more apposite, or a sentiment rendered less perplexed."[45]

To illustrate the above dynamics of the variorum page, the oscillation between authorial and multivocal, Gondris draws our attention to the fact that Malone's authorial claim that he has established the correct reading "beyond a doubt" is made within the confines of a single note. On the page itself, where it is only one of the notes, it plays a part of the rhythm of interpretative alternatives.[46] I should add

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stubborn refusal to emend if I can get any sense at all out of the folio." He himself contemplates an idea very close to eighteenth century critics that " in one sense I should be arguing that since Renaissance dramatic texts are designed to be unstable, we are in fact not being true to them by religiously preserving what happened to come from the printing house" (Stephen Orgel, "What is an Editor?" in *Shakespeare and the Editorial Tradition*, ed. Stephen Orgel and Sean Keilen [New York, London: Garland, 1999], p. 25.).

43. Walsh, p. 15.
44. Steevens, p. 73.
45. Steevens, p. 74.
46. Gondris, p. 138.

that a further twist in the dynamic is that the last note reflects the latest (and most authoritative) note on the crux, many times (but not always) a contribution by the editor.

In the conflict of Steevens with Malone and with his own earlier principles two textual visions collide: on the one hand, the principles of collation and historicity, and on the other hand conjectural emendations and aesthetic considerations. Nick Groom argues that Steevens's 1793 edition "was an attempt to make a poetical variorum of conjectural emendation, and he reassessed the old Tonson editions of Rowe, Pope and Warburton. He also developed his aesthetic Shakespeare criticism."[47] Sherbo pointed out that literary criticism of Steevens had been rare until 1793 when he "emerges as an original and (presumably) influential critic of singular sensitivity."[48] It is difficult to explain why Steevens, with his pre-eminent role in textual scholarship in the 1773 and 1778 editions, returned to the old-fashioned principle he himself condemned earlier. Although I readily accept Nick Groom's assessment that we should "forgive his final editions as either a last, desperate experiment – or perhaps simply a reminder that Shakespeare was after all, a poet"[49] I would rather maintain that Steevens tested an alternative solution to contrast his earlier editorial principles. His "backward" turn which Malone considered as a betrayal of the editorial principles they had shared may envelop the recognition that editions are constructs and can be constructed on different principles. Steevens is a unique example that an editor may have shared two editorial traditions in two different phases of his professional life if playful enough about the constructed nature of those principles.

There are reasons to treat Steevens as a poetic editor by the end of his career. He left more room for conjectural emendations, included more literary criticism in his notes, allowed for more liberty regulating line and metre. Steevens could also be labelled as an editor who according to Malone professed principles such as "we may *add* or *expunge* at pleasure" therefore to label him as old-fashioned by the end of the century. Yet, Malone's textual theories were later dismissed by New Bibliography, a school that was undermined by a new school of textual criticism emerging in the 1970s and 1980s. What Steevens had recovered in his 1793 edition was a neo-classical sense of Shakespeare's universality, not to think of "Shakespeare" as a mere piece of antiquity or textual archaeology but poetry shaped by the sensibilities and understandings of the age.

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47. Groom, p. lxiv.
48. Quoted in Groom, p. lxiv.
49. Groom, p. lxvi.

This appropriation by necessity entails the appreciation of tradition, of received text and of received knowledge. However, as Steevens's example shows the received text is treated critically and the editor is aware that it is exposed to change. In methodology the emphasis is on hypothesis – testing in dialogue with earlier editors and on the process of articulating an argument in its evolution, which is best illustrated in the variorum form. The practice of relying on the opinion of previous editors, the publication of contradictory arguments, the admittance of being wrong or not knowing enhance the primary importance of the idea that knowledge is cumulative, and the contribution of the individual editor is partial. Seen from the point of view of cultural history the tradition of the received text is a *memento* of the non-referentiality of any Shakespeare edition.