

58. Reading the First Folio Then and Now  
Abstracts

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**“Towards the ‘Living Variorum:’ Reading the First Folio in a Cross-Media Digital Environment”**

The phrase ‘living variorum’ was first used by Larry Friedlander in the late 1980s, and still offers a way of imagining still unrealized aspects of the potential of digital technologies to enhance, and even transform Shakespeare studies. There are by now many online projects that provide access to transcriptions of early texts, facsimiles of those text, illustrations and photographs, and video from films or live productions of the plays, and plans are also being made for linkage among projects. While linked online collections, and tools for searching across them are clearly vital components of a rich future now well within reach in our field, it is not as clear that as much attention is being given to the fine-grained hyperlinking of related materials that was a part of the inaugurating vision Shakespeare in multimedia hypertextual forms.

Using, primarily, the resources of the *Shakespeare Electronic Archive* and the *MIT Global Shakespeares Video and Performance Archive*, as well as those of affiliated projects including HamletWorks, the *Taiwan Shakespeare Database*, and *Digital Shakespeare Digital Brasil*, as well as other sites, I would like to contribute to this workshop by creating online examples of several pathways from First Folio readings to commentaries on those reading, works of art and illustration, and video examples that are 1.) accessible from specific lines or words in the text 2.) move through materials from several archives or projects, and 3.) are aimed at an audience of students as well as researchers, so that the gap between research archive and online cross-media reading text is narrowed.

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**"Introducing undergraduates to the detection and interpretation of press variants in the First Folio"**

This paper describes the contribution to a year-long course on "Text Technologies" at De Montfort University made by examination of Meisei University's Shakespeare First Folios. At De Montfort's Centre for Textual Studies, the students learn to set several of Shakespeare's sonnets in movable type, impose the type-pages as a forme, and impress them on an Albion printing press. Typically they find typesetting errors that they correct without removing the forme from the press, and thus they learn about

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press variants between exemplars of an edition. Thereafter the students visit Meisei University to look for press variants between its twelve First Folios, using MR774 as the base text and relying upon naked-eye and magnifying-glass examination and USB microscope imaging to compare exemplars. Innocent of prior editorial work on the problem, the students make sense of the raw evidence before their eyes. From their knowledge of printing and early modern English they must decide whether each variant is intentional or accidental. If intentional, further determinations include deciding: i) whether the change was made for the purpose of correcting the reading, ii) which is the *before* and which the *after* state, iii) what light the readings from any collateral substantive editions throw upon the problem, iv) whether the printer's copy had to be consulted to make the alteration, and v) in the light of all these just what reading was in the printer's copy.

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**“Whoores subtile shifts”: Commonplacing Women in the Meisei Copy of the Shakespeare First Folio’.**

My plans for this paper are still provisional and could develop in a number of ways. I have not yet worked extensively with Meisei University’s First Folio MR774, so I figured I would embrace the spirit of the workshop and see what I can discover myself by reading around in it and using Meisei University’s remarkable website, “The Shakespeare Folios Electronic Library.”

I initial began with the idea that it might be interesting to compare the comments of William Johnstoune in MR774, which are thought to date to sometime around the early 1620s or 1630s, with those of Abraham Wright, who recorded in his commonplace book from around 1640 brief observations on twenty-eight plays (two by Shakespeare, *Othello* and *Hamlet*). Here we have two readers from roughly the same time period who have left evidence of their reading of early modern drama, Johnstoune of plays printed in a single folio collection from 1623, Wright of plays published individually in quarto usually during the 1620s and 1630s. Thinking about these two readers in relation to each other could potentially open up new ideas about reading drama in the two decades after the publication of the Shakespeare First Folio.

In beginning to think about these two readers, though, and comparing Wright’s opinion of *Othello* (“a very good play both for lines and plot”) with the Johnstoune’s notes on the play, I happened upon another idea. Johnstoune makes pointed comments about women on several pages of *Othello*, such as “a description of womens Imperfections and falsehoods”; “women beguile the thing the are / by seeming

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otherwise”; “description of vice and lust in all women” (sig. 2t1r). Each of these notes could be seen as the result of the stage action in Act 2, Scene 1, in which Iago is prompted by Desdemona to “praise” various types of women, but these notes also potentially tell us something significant about Johnstoune’s own reading practices. A cursory examination of Johnstoune’s other comments about “women” in the First Folio suggests a marked preference for derogatory observations. These comments occur in the earliest comedies (*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*: “young women refuse what they most desire / a womans reason” [sig. B5r]), through the histories (*1 Henry the Fourth*: “Secrets not to be trusted \ to women” [sig. e3r]), and into the tragedies (*Cymbeline*: “all vices in men come from their mothers” [sig. 3a2v]). These types of comments, which are not present in Wright’s commonplace book, are remarkable for their consistent misogyny. I am thinking Johnstoune’s marginalia surely must draw on proverbial commonplaces about women, which is another way I might pursue the question of what type of reader he was, and also open up the question of how the gender politics in Shakespeare’s plays were read in early modern England.

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### **“Direction through Indirection: Teaching the First Folio by Reading the Reader”**

For the SAA 2015 Workshop entitled “Reading the First Folio Then and Now” I plan to contribute an essay on teaching Shakespeare at the graduate level through attention to early reader response. Such an approach is only one among many strategies by which students can be encouraged to grapple with Shakespearean texts, but I believe that tremendous pedagogical value lies in the simple insistence that students observe how earlier readers made sense of a work that they themselves are now studying. After all, these students also scribble in their books – whether with pencils or Microsoft track notes – and they therefore discover refracted images of themselves when they confront the readerly behavior of such individuals as the mid-seventeenth century owner of the First Folio now held at Meisei University (MR774). To examine this reader’s marginal comments on passages within a play is to practice close reading without being asked to do so, and it is to participate as well in an exercise of meaning-making that brings modern students about as close to early modern subjectivity as they are likely to come.

My essay will include an assignment I have designed for graduate-level study of the Meisei First Folio; it will offer excerpts from graduate-student responses to this assignment; and it will conclude with reflections on the purpose and value of early readership studies.

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**“Teaching Bibliography and Palaeography Using the Meisei Shakespeare Collection Database”**

This is a course plan for the introduction of bibliography and palaeography utilizing the Meisei database for Japanese students (in MA course and third- and fourth-year of undergraduate).

I. Objectives of this course:

1. Making students familiar with the First Folio and early modern editions. Also making them understand how modern editions are processed through comparison with early editions.
2. Letting students acquire basic knowledge of bibliography using the First Folio as example.
3. Letting students acquire basic knowledge of palaeography by reading the marginalia on Meisei MR774 – and also having them discuss their contents.

II. The main text: *All's Well That Ends Well*

I pick this play on the following grounds:

1. There are relatively abundant marginalia on it on MR774
2. It is generally regarded as set by plural compositors of the First Folio.
3. I am conducting a close-reading seminar of it in the same semester.

III. Summary of the course

The 15-week course (90 minutes each week) will be divided into two sections, each focussing on bibliography and palaeography. Questions to be asked will include the following.

Week 1: introduction

- Who is William Shakespeare? What is the First Folio?
- What is folio?
- Who are Isaac Jaggard and Ed. Blount? What are comedies, histories and tragedies? Who are John Heminge and Henry Condell?

Weeks 2-8: bibliography

- What is signature? What is the advantage of using it instead of pagination? How can we describe the First Folio's physical make-up by this means?
- Why is *Troilus and Cressida* not listed on the table of contents?
- Who are compositors? How did they work, especially on *All's Well That Ends Well*?

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- What is *All's Well That Ends Well*?
- How is the First Folio text different from modern editions (spellings, speech prefixes, &c.)?

Weeks 9-15: palaeography

- What is the (English) secretary hand? How is it different from the Italic hand, for example on MR733? How can we read it?
- Who is William Johnstone?
- Why did Johnstone (or the annotator of MR774) make notes? What was he interested in?

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My goal for this workshop is to think about “Reading the First Folio” in a broad sense: how do we interpret and shape the significance of the Folio? What investments (scholarly, cultural, or otherwise) are involved? And how are digital resources changing the ways we understand the status of the Folio?

I would like to try to connect a pedagogical strategy (or maybe just a hobbyhorse) that I call “breaking Shakespeare apart” to some of my current and future scholarly work. The former focuses on the ways in which the First Folio was first understood (by producers and consumers) and how it has been “broken apart” since then, both literally (fragments, leaf books) and metaphorically (through reading practices such as commonplacing). The latter is immediately focused on an essay for the *Cambridge Companion to the First Folio* for which I’ve been given the title “The Folio as fetish,” which is intended to think about the Folio’s dual status as both a “highly valued bibliographic object and as kitsch commodity.” Is “fetish” the term we should be using? Perhaps so, since the zeal for this object of worship has only been amplified as digital facsimiles multiply – facsimiles which bring together and make accessible widely dispersed objects, yet also break them apart into individual images which allow for and demand new reading practices.

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**“the greatest fauour of the Commons”: the making of the digital Bodleian First Folio**

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This paper describes the decisions and processes behind the creation of the Bodleian First Folio. It considers the aspirations and pragmatics of creating a resource fit for multiple audiences.

A copy of Shakespeare's First Folio arrived at Oxford's Bodleian Library in 1623. It was deacquired some time after the Third Folio's publication, 1663/4. Brought back to the Library by chance in 1905, a public funding campaign assured its permanent return to the Bodleian.

Due to its fragility, it has been little studied since. This fragility, caused by its heavy use, is of primary interest to scholars. Bodleian Conservation team believes that the book's extensive marks of wear come from readers' use in its early life, chained on open-access shelving in what was known as "the public library". Our goal was to create a "digital avatar" (Tarte's term) which revealed the materiality of the book, made it accessible to readers primarily interested in the contents, and enabled reuse.

Stabilization and digitization of the First Folio were crowd-funded, taking inspiration from Emma Smith's research into the 1905-6 public campaign. The XML-encoded text was added to the updated resource later, thanks to generous private donations. The resource was therefore required to be useful to all its potential audiences, specialist and non-expert alike. The author of this paper conceived and led the public campaign and the project that created the digital resource.

This project was a collaboration across the Bodleian, the University of Oxford's e-Research Centre and IT Services, as well as faculty members from several universities. The resource was influenced by other digital facsimiles of early printed Shakespeare, including some of the team's previous work on the Shakespeare Quartos Archive. Work on the Bodleian First Folio continues, and this paper will present the project's latest developments.