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MEDIATING EVIL:
THE EDITORIAL AND CRITICAL
RECEPTION OF SHAKESPEARE'S VILLAINS

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I will begin at the end, Hamlet's end, which, as we all know, is silence. Or so we thought until the 1986 Oxford *Complete Works*, in which Hamlet's words, "the rest is silence," are followed by four "O's"—"O, O, O, O"—before a stage direction declares that "he dies" (5.2.310–11).¹ What the Oxford editors did was to follow the text in the First Folio (1623) rather than the second quarto (1604/05), on which most modern editions are based. In the second quarto, no enigmatic "O's" intervene between the word "silence" and Hamlet's death. Whatever these four "O's" are—peaceful sighs or groans in agony?—they are *not* silence. So how did Shakespeare conceive of Hamlet's end? A silent end which Hamlet's "silence" ends? Or, more troublingly, a final affirmation by Hamlet, "the rest is silence," which he goes on to contradict with his final sounds? The answer is that we do not know. To the extent that the texts we read must embed an answer to this question, editors are the people who decide. Editors decide what readers think Shakespeare intended.

What the case of Hamlet's end illustrates is that all access to Shakespeare has always already been editorially mediated. With the exception of a small portion of an early modern manuscript play called "The Booke of Sir Thomas More," none of Shakespeare's plays are extant in his own hand.² What we have are early editions on which later editions are based. Any editorial intervention implies change: spelling and punctuation are modernized; verse is re-lined; prose is set as verse, or verse as prose; emendations are followed or rejected, speech headings are regularized, and stage directions are expanded, displaced, changed, or added; act and scene divisions are added or modified, as are *dramatis personae* lists; one substantive early text is followed rather than another, or both are conflated; and—at least since the eighteenth century—a growing apparatus is added to the text with which to guide the readerly reception: annotation, collation, introductions, appendices, and so on. Any

Shakespeare edition involves complex editorial invention which turns the play text into something very different from the early modern playbook.

I have investigated elsewhere the whole range of editorial interventions and what far-reaching impact they have on how "Shakespeare" reaches us today.³ The aim of the present article is more specific: what is the editorial impact on the mediation of evil in Shakespeare's plays, evil as it is practiced by some of Shakespeare's famous characters, Richard III, Macbeth, and, perhaps most importantly, Iago? In the face of the ferocious and often gratuitous evil perpetrated by these characters, how do and did editors intervene to mediate such evil to readers? The approach of today's editors is essentially scholarly and proceeds chiefly by means of annotation with notes that are variously "textual, etymological, intertextual, contextual, dramatic, or critical,"⁴ or a mixture of several of these. Modern editors may help us understand what complex entity the "Nature" is to which Edmund, in *King Lear*, starts addressing his soliloquy in act 1, scene 2, or they can unravel for us the tortuous logic and syntax with which Macbeth considers killing Duncan at the beginning of act 1, scene 7. Yet earlier editors were not satisfied with a mediation that aims at increasing readers' intellectual understanding. Rather, in the nineteenth century, editors were also guided by moral considerations and intervened in the plays so as to make of Shakespeare a teacher who conveyed the right values.

Before focussing on how Shakespeare's editors have handled evil, I wish to touch on the *critical* response to evil in Shakespeare. A number of commentators have referred to the metaphysical conception of evil, common in the Middle Ages, as nothingness or non-being and analyzed Shakespeare's relationship to it. The so-called "privative theory of evil" presupposes that "evil has no essential being but exists only negatively, like darkness, which is in reality nothing but the absence of light."⁵ All being is good, held the third-century Roman philosopher Plotinus (often called the father of Neoplatonism), a formulation his pupil Origen adapted to Christianity, thereby allowing himself to defend God against the charge of having created evil. In the following century, Augustine similarly came to adhere to this view, rejecting the Manichean advocacy of good and evil as coexistent and equally substantial, and thereby reconciling God's goodness with His omnipotence. Other theologians followed suit throughout the Middle Ages—"Malum est non ens," "Evil is not essence," as Thomas of Aquinas put it. Translated into art, what this conception means is that evil—however threatening and grand it may appear—is ultimately hollow and ludicrous, laughable pretence rather than dangerous substance.

According to one critical strand, this is how Shakespeare dramatizes evil. In line with the theology and art of medieval Christianity, Charlotte Spivack argues, "Shakespeare accepted—at least for dramatic purposes—the theological definition of evil as non-Being"; if some fail to perceive that Shakespeare subscribes to the "view of evil as a subject for mocking laughter," that is because the reception of plays like *Othello* and *Richard III* has been "marred by an anachronistic notion of a serious, brooding villain."⁶ According to this view, Shakespeare's evil characters, like Milton's Satan according to C. S. Lewis,⁷ may at first appear heroic and compelling but end up revealing their vacuousness.

This view poses the problem that it does not account for the appeal Iago, Richard III, and their peers have exerted on generations of readers and spectators. It is therefore not surprising that other critics beg to disagree. Instead of seeing him as a late inheritor of the medieval privative theory of evil, Neil Forsyth argues for Shakespeare as a precursor of the Romantic notion of "evil as grandeur."⁸ Shakespearean evil is far from hollow, Forsyth incisively argues, because the characters who impersonate it are so enjoyable. Shakespeare brings this about, according to Forsyth, by wedding the characters' interiority to evil, a process for which the soliloquy is a crucial device: Shakespeare uses "the soliloquy to make us enjoy the feeling of complicity with the villain," making us "enjoy his wit, his brilliant energy."⁹ Even in the case of Macbeth, we come "reluctantly towards his point of view" because of the character's "poetic intensity" and "the uncanny psychological accuracy of the language."¹⁰ As much as we disapprove of Macbeth's deeds, we are unable to resist the appealing intensity of his thinking. Whereas Charlotte Spivack's response to Shakespearean evil is distancing laughter, that of Forsyth is uncomfortable complicity.

Whether we see Shakespearean evil as ultimately hollow or disturbing is related to the question of whether his evil characters are perceived to be endowed with motivation for their deeds. Take the example of Iago. Coleridge described his actions as "motiveless Malignity"¹¹ and realized that the very absence of motivation makes evil more disturbing. Whereas motives can provide reassuring explanations for evil actions, perhaps even excuse them, their absence makes evil unaccountable and therefore all the more threatening. Critics have often mentioned possible reasons for Iago's conduct, but perhaps none of them, with the possible exception of A. C. Bradley,¹² has done so as comprehensively as the anonymous author of "An Apology for the Character and Conduct of Iago," published in a volume of *Essays, by a Society of Gentlemen* in Exeter in 1796—a genuine oddity in Shakespeare criticism. The "Apology" systematically surveys the

reasons for Iago's behavior—resentment at Cassio's appointment and suspicion of an adulterous relationship between Othello and Emilia, among many others—to conclude that "if vengeance can be vindicated by an accumulation of injuries, Iago's though exorbitant, was just."¹³

In diametrical opposition to this, Bernard Spivack, not to be confused with the above-mentioned Charlotte Spivack, identified a group of Shakespearean villains—including Iago—whose malignity is ultimately motiveless insofar as Shakespeare preserves a distinct "discrepancy . . . between their behaviour and their explanations."¹⁴ In relation to Iago, Spivack writes that his "hate is subject to the same comment that T. S. Eliot makes about Hamlet's grief—it lacks an 'objective correlative.' It has no particular connection with the opportunities of the human situation displayed within the tragedy."¹⁵ According to this view, Shakespearean evil—epitomized in Iago—is all the more disturbing as appropriate motivation for vicious action is specifically withheld. The *mystery* of iniquity, to put it with Paul, is thus what partly accounts for the dramatization of evil in Shakespeare.

What the above critics share is that they offer intellectual attempts to come to terms with evil in Shakespeare. Yet, prior to the twentieth century, the concern of Shakespeare's critics and editors in dealing with the subject of evil was as much moral as intellectual. Samuel Johnson, in his "Preface to Shakespeare," comments on what he sees as Shakespeare's chief defects, and the first one he addresses is Shakespeare's dramatization of "the wicked":

His first defect is that to which may be imputed most of the evil in books or in men. He sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose. From his writings indeed a system of social duty may be selected, for he that thinks reasonably must think morally; but his precepts and axioms drop casually from him; he makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is always careful to shew in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked; he carries his persons indifferently through right and wrong, and at the close dismisses them without further care, and leaves their examples to operate by chance. This fault the barbarity of his age cannot extenuate; for it is always a writer's duty to make the world better, and justice is a virtue independent on time or place.¹⁶

Like Forsyth more than two centuries later, Johnson is keenly aware of the appeal of evil in Shakespeare, but whereas Forsyth analyzes how Shakespeare achieves this appeal, Johnson objects to it on moral grounds, disapproving of a dramatization of evil that does not prompt "disapprobation" in "the virtuous." Writing about Shakespeare, Johnson

elsewhere comments that "there is always danger lest wickedness conjoined with abilities should steal upon esteem, though it misses of approbation."¹⁷ In our response to characters such as Macbeth, Iago, Richard, and Edmund, Shakespeare achieves a tension between an ethical and an aesthetic pull, between our awareness of their "wickedness" and our "esteem" for their energy, intelligence, resourcefulness, and the complexity of their interiority. What distinguishes Johnson's eighteenth-century response from modern scholarship is that Johnson conceives of this tension in our response as a "danger" for which Shakespeare is to be held responsible and deserves to be criticized.

Between Johnson and our modern reception of Shakespeare in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries stands the nineteenth century, in particular nineteenth-century editions to which I now turn. The nineteenth century constitutes surprisingly uncharted territory in the history of Shakespeare studies and, in particular, of Shakespeare editions. The eighteenth century, as Michael Dobson has eloquently argued,¹⁸ saw the making of the national poet, and the history of eighteenth-century Shakespeare scholarship, in particular of the important editions by Nicholas Rowe, Alexander Pope, Lewis Theobald, Samuel Johnson, George Steevens, Edward Capell, and Edmond Malone, has been examined in some detail.¹⁹ Following the towering achievement of Malone's ten-volume *Plays and Poems* of 1790, no groundbreaking Shakespeare edition followed for a long time, and, with the exception of the Cambridge edition by William George Clark, John Glover, and William Aldis Wright (1863–66), the nineteenth-century is conspicuously devoid of important scholarly editions of Shakespeare. It seems significant that the call for contributions on the topic of "Shakespeare in the Nineteenth Century" for *Shakespeare Survey* prompted little interest. The editor's note in volume 35 (1982) admits that "the announced theme of the present volume . . . attracted fewer submissions than usual,"²⁰ and only five articles appeared on Shakespeare in the nineteenth century, including four on Shakespeare on the nineteenth-century stage.

Judged by purely scholarly standards, the nineteenth century thus has far fewer milestones of Shakespeare reception than the eighteenth. This does not mean, however, that general interest in Shakespeare sagged. On the contrary: more than eight hundred separate editions of collected works were published in the nineteenth century.²¹ What did change is that by far the greatest number of nineteenth-century editions aim at a popular readership. Eighteenth-century Shakespeare scholarship was still the privilege of the happy few, and reading the annotation to eighteenth-century Shakespeare editions conveys the impression of overhearing a

conversation by a small group of specialists. By the nineteenth century, literacy rates had significantly risen, and the status of Shakespeare as the towering figure of the literary canon was firmly established. This created a market for popular editions that catered to the new segments in Shakespeare's readership. These editions may be of little scholarly value and have therefore received little critical attention.²² They are of considerable interest, however, for the way in which they mediate Shakespeare's plays to an increasingly broad readership.

A particularly telling feature of this mediation is how evil in Shakespeare receives a treatment that is radically different from both Samuel Johnson's in the eighteenth and that of modern critics in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. A case in point is the edition by A. Cunningham, *The Dramatic Works and Poems of William Shakespeare* (London, 1853). Cunningham prefaces the plays with short introductions in which evil in Shakespeare, far from being disturbing, is argued to serve the purpose of instilling sound morality. So in *Hamlet*, Cunningham argues, "we see exemplified the proverbial saying, 'Murder will out'; for by introducing the Ghost of the murdered King, Shakespeare intended no doubt to intimate, that though secrecy may veil the deed of the murderer for a time, Providence, that 'suffers not a sparrow to fall to the ground unnoticed,' will by supernatural agency both expose and punish the aggressor" (xxxv). *Macbeth*, similarly, depicts "the length to which unprincipled ambition will carry mankind, when once their imaginations are possessed with it," but, reassuringly, Shakespeare shows that Macbeth's "fall is more rapid than his exultation" (xix). The villain Don John, in *Much Ado about Nothing*, demonstrates "how suddenly, and by what unforeseen accidents, the most cunningly devised calumny may be discovered, and how certainly virtue will at least be rewarded" (xiii). In *King Lear*, finally, "Shakespeare no doubt intended particularly to mark the afflicting of children's ingratitude to their parents; and in the conduct of Goneril and Regan to each other, especially in the the [sic] former's poisoning the latter, and laying violent hands on herself, we are taught that those who want gratitude towards their parents (who gave them their being, fed them, nurtured them to man's estate), will not scruple to commit more barbarous crimes, and easily to forget that by destroying their body, they destroy their soul also" (xxxiii–xxxiv). Evil in Shakespeare's plays, according to these introductions, has nothing disturbing about it, as it inevitably leads to punishment of the wicked and the triumph of virtue. By contrast, a century earlier, Samuel Johnson was deeply troubled by the fact that Shakespeare had "suffered the virtue of Cordelia to perish in a just cause contrary to the natural ideas of justice," and had been "so shocked

by Cordelia's death" that he was long reluctant ever "to read again the last scenes of the play."²³

Cunningham's is a little-known edition, contrary to that by Henrietta and Thomas Bowdler, which has given the English language the verb *to bowdlerize*: "To expurgate (a book or writing), by omitting or modifying words or passages considered indelicate or offensive" (*OED*). The Bowdler edition—called *The Family Shakespeare*—first appeared in 1807 and was exceptionally successful, going through roughly twenty editions by 1889. In this edition, as the title page points out, "Nothing is Added to the Original Text, but Those Words and Expressions are Omitted which Cannot with Propriety Be Read in a Family" (title page). The preface to the first edition articulates its policy of expurgation, spelling out that it has been "endeavoured to remove every thing that could give just offence to the religious and virtuous mind" (vii). And what gives offense, according to the Bowdlers, is chiefly Shakespeare's bawdy, so that the edition is now associated with prudish censorship.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that this leaves the dramatization of Shakespeare's evil intact. In the case of *Othello*, in particular, the dramatization of evil is inextricably linked with the sexual, indeed with "Iago's pornographic fantasies,"²⁴ with which Othello is led to suspect and eventually kill his wife. The opening of act 4 provides a good example. I quote the text from Bowdler, adding between square brackets the excised material:

Enter OTHELLO, and IAGO.

Iago. Will you think so?

Oth. Think so, Iago?

[*IAGO* What, to kiss in private?

OTHELLO An unauthorized kiss.

IAGO Or to be naked with her friend in bed

An hour or more, not meaning any harm?

OTHELLO Naked in bed, Iago, and not mean harm?

It is hypocrisy against the devil.

They that mean virtuously and yet do so,

The devil their virtue tempts, and they tempt heaven.

IAGO If they do nothing, 'tis a venial slip.]

Iago. But if I give my wife a handkerchief—

Oth. What then?

Iago. Why then, 'tis hers, my lord; and, being hers,

She may, I think, bestow't on any man.

Oth. She is protectress of her honour too;

May she give that?

(4.1.1–15)

As Lynda Boose has shown,²⁵ the devastating impact of Iago's strategy on Othello depends on an insinuated connection between two elements: the strawberry-spotted handkerchief and the stained wedding sheets which "she hath contaminated" by adultery (4.1.203), as Iago suggests. The Bowdler edition leaves intact the handkerchief but removes the bed on which Desdemona is "naked with her friend in bed," thereby inhibiting this association. A crucial question Shakespeare's play raises is whether the fatal outcome is more a matter of Iago's machinations or of Othello's susceptibility to them, the result of seeds of suspicion Iago plants or Othello already contains. Expurgation in *The Family Shakespeare* edition profoundly affects the answer readers are likely to give. By omitting much of the reason Shakespeare gives Othello for succumbing to Iago's manipulations, the Bowdler text locates the origins of the fatal outcome as much in Othello as it does in Iago. Shakespeare, by comparison, insists on Iago's skillful manipulation. Bowdler, in other words, takes the sting out of Shakespeare's dramatization of the power of evil.

The Bowdlers' *Family Shakespeare* is the most famous but by no means the only expurgated nineteenth-century edition of Shakespeare. For instance, *The School-Shakespeare* (1822), by "the Rev. J. R. Pitman . . . alternate evening preacher at the Foundling and Magdalen Hospitals" (title page), omits a great many passages "so that taste may be cultivated, without offence to delicate and religious feelings" (v). In *Richard III*, for instance, Pitman expurgates a five-line passage (1.1.36–40) from Richard's opening soliloquy, in which the protagonist refers to himself as "subtle, false, treacherous." Like the Bowdlers, Pitman considerably abridges the part of Iago, omitting, for instance, the following lines addressed to Othello:

And then, sir, he would gripe and wring my hand,
Cry "O sweet creature!"; then kiss me hard,
As if he plucked up kisses by the roots,
That grew upon my lips, lay his leg o'er my thigh,
And sigh, and kiss.

(3.3.425–29)

By expurgating passages like the present one, with which Iago skillfully manipulates Othello's imagination, Pitman arguably deprives Iago of the most subtly vicious part of his strategy.

As we have seen so far, two chief *loci* which served nineteenth-century editors to defuse the disturbing effect of Shakespeare's dramatization of evil are the introduction (as in Cunningham) and the text itself (as in Bowdler). A third *locus* that served editors to pre-empt the unsettling

effect of Shakespearean evil is the annotation. Various objections to annotation have been voiced through the ages: Samuel Johnson considered footnotes "necessary evils" which cause the mind to be "refrigerated by interruption,"²⁶ and Noël Coward objected that "having to read footnotes was like having to go downstairs to answer the door when upstairs making love."²⁷ Nonetheless, annotation has long been crucial in bridging the historical and cultural divide separating Shakespeare's late sixteenth- or early seventeenth-century plays from their readers in later centuries. Whereas extensive annotation had previously been the prerogative of the classics, English poets, from the eighteenth century, were increasingly paid the same compliment, following Patrick Hume's *Annotations on Paradise Lost* (1695), and as evidenced in Shakespeare editions starting with Nicholas Rowe's in 1709.²⁸

At least one accepted goal of annotation has remained constant: "not a single passage in the whole work has appeared to me . . . obscure, which I have not endeavoured to illustrate," as Johnson put it in his "Preface" to Shakespeare,²⁹ an endeavour which responsible editors of all ages share. Yet the specific form annotation takes has shown considerable variety over time. In recent times, for instance, the annotation to Shakespeare editions has become more attuned to the performance potential offered by the play than used to be the case. Whereas notes used to focus on the verbal, many of the best editors now also emphasize the interplay of the visual and the verbal.³⁰ Another specificity of recent annotation is a generally frank glossing of Shakespeare's bawdy, "impudent . . . in its etymological sense,"³¹ meaning free from shame, rather than "coy and unhelpful."³²

A specificity of the remarkable Shakespeare edition by Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke (1864–68) is that the annotation is devoted not only to the usual scholarly tasks, such as elucidating linguistic difficulties, explaining historical and classical allusion, exposing and clarifying errors in the text, and identifying literary sources, but also to a moralizing assessment of characters and actions.³³ So Regan is described as "cruelly cold and hard" and Goneril as "haughtily unfeeling" (468), a later footnote commenting on Regan's "coldly malignant face and brutal inexorability of manner" and describing Goneril as "the haughtily frowning woman, the scornfully flashing-eyed woman" (488). The treatment Iago receives is no less explicit. The last line of his concluding soliloquy in act 2, scene 1—"Knavery's plain face is never seen till us'd" (2.1.311)—is annotated as follows: "Iago's complacent contemplation of his own villainy, his willing self-admission of scoundrelism, are thoroughly those of a man whose pride of intellect is all-engrossing, and who has no one perception of moral beauty or dignity" (536). Elsewhere, a footnote refers to Iago as "vile . . .

unjust and vicious . . . unscrupulous and remorseless . . . an innate villain . . . a hard, cold-blooded, almost vivacious scoundrel" (531). Like A. C. Bradley a few decades later, the Cowden Clarkes abstract characters from the linguistic material that constitutes them, and respond to them as to human beings rather than artistic creations (in keeping with Charles's earlier character criticism, *Shakespeare-Characters: Chiefly Those Subordinate* (1863), and Mary's fifteen tales published as *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines*, in three volumes, in 1850–52). Yet unlike Bradley, the Cowden Clarkes are chiefly interested in morality rather than in motivation and psychology. The Iago who emerges from their annotation is a repugnant moral monster rather than a character that not only Othello and Desdemona but also readers and spectators may find dangerously appealing.

Similar annotation makes of *Macbeth* a negative object lesson. The protagonist's response to the announcement of his wife's death—

SEYTON The queen, my lord, is dead
MACBETH She should have died hereafter;
There would have been a time for such a word.

(5.5.16–17)

—is provided with the following footnote:

Nothing could have served more fully to show the utter prostration and despairing apathy of Macbeth's mind, after all his miserably fulfilled ambition, than the manner in which he receives the tidings of his wife's death. His first few words have almost the dullness of insensibility upon them; and he follows them up with a gloomy acquiescence in the universal poorness and nothingness of all things that belongs to the utterly disappointed man. No more pregnant lesson upon the worthlessness of fruition in unholy desires was ever penned than Shakespeare's "Macbeth." (358)

To read the play as a "pregnant lesson"—the metaphor is an interesting one in the context of *Macbeth*³⁴—on what evil may lead to conveniently removes the sting from Shakespeare's dramatization of evil. The Cowden Clarkes focus on the "unholy desires" of a supposed immoral human being from whom Shakespeare supposedly distances us, rather than (as Forsyth does) on the poetic intensity of a fictional character with which Shakespeare leads us into uncomfortable complicity. As a result, the Shakespeare who emerges from the Cowden Clarkes' edition is one with whose morality the common Victorian reader could safely be entrusted. Packaged as an advocate of exemplary moral and social behaviour,

Shakespeare, the Cowden Clarkes' annotation implies, only dramatized evil in order to condemn it.

This, at least, is one device in the Cowden Clarkes' annotation. Another is to exonerate characters and actions that we might find disturbing. A case in point is Hamlet's reluctance to kill Claudius at prayer on the grounds that his uncle deserves eternal damnation, which has struck many critics as difficult to reconcile with a post-Romantic view of the noble Dane. It is instructive to see how the Cowden Clarkes account for Hamlet's behavior (in a footnote to the "Now might I do it" soliloquy):

Hamlet's nature, his reflective mind, his scholarly habits, all cause him to recoil from the idea of shedding blood; but his sense of what is due to a father's memory, and to avenging a father's murder, impel him to stern retribution; and while yielding to his own strong reluctance, he satisfies the urgings of his conscience by telling himself that he will take a still more ample vengeance by deferring the deed. It is the excuse of hesitation under the semblance of determined cruelty. (408)

Hamlet's dominant impulse, in other words, is to shrink from violence, so the resolve to kill Claudius later, when he is "about some act / That has no relish of salvation in't" (3.3.91-92), only serves to rationalize this impulse. Shakespeare's representation of Hamlet's morally disturbing resolve is thus disposed of by the Cowden Clarkes with the disarmingly simple argument that Hamlet does not mean what he says.

A similar mechanism is at work in the annotation to *Romeo and Juliet*. The killing of Paris in the final scene jars with a view of Romeo as an unproblematic romantic hero:

PARIS I do defy thy conjuration,
And apprehend thee for a felon here.
ROMEO (*drawing*) Wilt thou provoke me? Then have at thee, boy!
They fight.
[PAGE] O Lord, they fight! I will go call the watch. *Exit*
PARIS O, I am slain!

(5.3.68-72)

Shakespeare leaves little doubt that Romeo is the aggressor. While the killing of Tybalt in act 3, scene 1 can be explained by Tybalt's slaying of Mercutio and the consequent heat of the moment, no similar excuse is available here. The problem has often been recognized, for instance by Franco Zeffirelli, who saw no other option than to omit the sequence from his production, for if Romeo "was a murderer—'ugly boy, ugly boy!' It wouldn't have worked."³⁵ The Cowden Clarkes, by contrast, pass over

Romeo's aggression but grow lyrical when Romeo asks Paris, whom he has just slain, to "forgive me, cousin" (5.3.101):

Inexpressibly beautiful and moving is this gentleness of Romeo's in his death hour. His yearning to be at peace with his foe; his beseeching pardon of him and calling him kinsman in token of final atonement; his forbearance and even magnanimity towards Paris; his words of closing consideration and kindly farewell to his faithful Balthasar, all combine to crown Romeo as the prince of youthful gentlemen and lovers. Worthy is he of being the hero of the youthful Shakespeare's pen! (198)

The romanticized Romeo clearly differs from the more complex character Shakespeare created, given that Romeo, "in his death hour," is not only "yearning to be at peace" with Paris, but also violently attacks and kills him.

More surprisingly, Lady Macbeth is also exonerated from the charge of evil, in a footnote that comments on the last part of the banquet scene:

The fact is, Lady Macbeth, who is always considered a naturally hard, bold, bad woman, is, in truth, a woman who nerves herself to hardness and boldness for the sake of her husband whom she loves. She is a thoroughly unscrupulous woman; but she is anything but a vicious woman, or a woman without native feeling. . . . Witness her crushing resolutely down all her own sufferings from remorse to soothe those of Macbeth; and bearing her own nightly horrors of burdened conscience with so brave a silence that they kill her before she utters one syllable of complaint to him. (340)

Lady Macbeth may seem an unlikely candidate for the epithet "generous." Yet so powerful is the contemporary ideology of the silently suffering "affectionate . . . faithful wife" (340) that, once Lady Macbeth is enlisted in its service, she is easily turned into "anything but a vicious woman."³⁶ As a result, the Cowden Clarkes turn her into the victim of a killing ("they kill her") rather than the instigator of Duncan's murder. In the process, the edition achieves another victory in the containment of Shakespearean evil.

The Cowden Clarkes' annotation may seem to us altogether unscholarly, but many of the footnotes are in fact learned, with intelligent conjectural readings, full explanations of mythological allusions, and so on. Various notes comment on Shakespeare's style, distinguishing between different points in his career. The annotation to *Othello* pays detailed attention to the double time scheme, and the differences between the two substantive texts are carefully commented upon. The note on Iago's "togèd consuls" at 1.1.24 may serve as an example of the kind of scholarship the Cowden Clarkes regularly deploy: "['Togged'] is the word

in the First Quarto; while the Folio prints 'tongued.' 'Togèd' expresses 'gowned,' 'those who wear a toga'; and there is a similar misprint of 'tongue' for 'toge' pointed out in Note 88, Act ii, 'Coriolanus.' 'Consuls' is here used for 'state rulers,' 'civil governors,' 'members of the council'" (517-18). The preface to the 1875 edition states that "we have pursued a system of annotation which we think surpasses in scope of elucidation that which has hitherto been adopted" (viii), and it is true that, despite the moralistic footnotes, the annotation is thorough, and original rather than derivative. The edition does expurgate select passages, but, contrary to Bowdler, it does so reluctantly rather than liberally, the preface explaining that it was the "hope of having our present edition in the hands of readers in family circles, which induced us to yield to our publishers' desire that it might exclude phrases not thought objectionable at the time when Shakespeare wrote, but coarse and unfit for modern utterance" (vii). All in all, the edition is a fascinating mixture of the scholarly and the moralistic.

The chief effect of the Cowden Clarkes' moralistic annotation is that their edition mediates to readers not only Shakespeare's texts with the evil they dramatize, but also a morally "correct" response to the fictional characters and events, in particular to evil. If the eighteenth century (and eighteenth-century editions from Rowe to Malone in particular) *made* Shakespeare, turning him into the National Poet, then the nineteenth century, through editions like the Cowden Clarkes', made the Shakespearean reader, a reader who was shaped so as to morally endorse a Shakespeare whose literary excellence had been firmly established. As literacy rose and family reading became standard, it became a matter of some importance that the National Poet's literary excellence and consequent cultural cachet did not clash with moral shortcomings. An important cultural task of Shakespeare's nineteenth-century editors such as the Cowden Clarkes, the Bowdlers, and Cunningham was to avoid this clash by editorially constructing a Shakespeare whom readers would experience as morally safe or, even better, exemplary, a Shakespeare who could participate in the socio-religious work of inculcating taste and morals. This editorial construction of Shakespeare emerges clearly from the Cowden Clarkes' annotation but is even more clearly visible in their preface to the first edition:

Shakespeare will always remain an accurate test for true feeling and taste. His book of human character forms a grand standard by which men may measure themselves. It will prevent—duly consulted—the rank overgrowth of mercenariness, meanness, selfishness. Shakespeare's words contain a standard for morals. (ii)

This Shakespeare, in other words, has a job to do, providing a standard for feeling, taste, and morality. Editorial mediation is crucial to prepare Shakespeare for this job by means of sanitizing introductions, expurgations, and annotations. In the eighteenth century, Johnson could praise Shakespeare the artist but object to Shakespeare the moralist, lamenting the "danger" that Shakespeare's dramatized "wickedness conjoined with abilities should steal upon esteem."³⁷ This Shakespeare—a Shakespeare who is "more careful to please than to instruct"³⁸—will no longer do in the nineteenth century. Even less, of course, would it do to argue that Shakespeare "makes us enjoy the feeling of complicity with the villain," as Forsyth has recently done.³⁹ Far from writing "without any moral purpose,"⁴⁰ as Johnson had contended, the Cowden Clarkes' Shakespeare is a moralist of sorts:

It is not so much that he was the greatest intellect that ever wrote, as that he was the greatest moralist; and not moralist in the way of set moral teaching,—but as presenting those grand ethical lessons to be drawn from broad expansive delineation . . . As one instance of his moral teaching—deducible more than perceptive—witness the influence of his good people upon his bad people . . . The inseparable happiness and preferableness of right, he never fails to inculcate by subtlest truth of demonstration. (ii-iii)

Accordingly, the Cowden Clarkes can praise the "fine strain of [Shakespeare's] poetical justice" (iii), whereas Johnson, we remember, was outraged that "Shakespeare ha[d] suffered the virtue of Cordelia to perish in a just cause, contrary to the natural ideas of justice."⁴¹

This article has focused on the nineteenth-century editorial mediation of evil as dramatized in Shakespeare's plays. I have suggested that editors like the Cowden Clarkes, the Bowdlers, and Cunningham participate in the containment of Shakespearean evil. Whereas scholars before and after recognized that Shakespeare's villains often come across as unsettlingly appealing, editors in the nineteenth century found various ways of extirpating this appeal. By means of introductions, expurgations, and annotation, they sanitized the plays to suggest that Shakespeare dramatized evil as odious, or removed it from the plays altogether. I have further argued that this editorial mechanism was motivated by a desire to enlist Shakespeare as a moral teacher with whom to train the growing middle-class readership. We may well be tempted to look back condescendingly to how, in the nineteenth century, the seemingly objective, scholarly business of editing got inextricably mixed up with what we now consider transparent moralism. Yet the mechanism illustrates more generally that it is not just by means of performance but also through editorial intervention that Shakespeare is constantly reinvented, with every period creating its

own Shakespeare, or Shakespeares. Predictably enough, today's Shakespeare as mediated by editors is governed by postmodern textual instability and multiplicity. The Oxford *Complete Works* (1986, revised 2005) contains two *King Lear*s, the Norton Shakespeare (1997) even three, while the Arden series has recently come out with an edition of three *Hamlets* (2006). Whereas a number of nineteenth-century editors presented Shakespeare as moral, in keeping with a strong cultural imperative of their time, today's editors, in keeping with a cultural imperative of our own time, produce Shakespeare plays that are ontologically uncertain, multiple, anti-essentialist. Today as in the past, editors—the “pimps of discourse,” as Gary Taylor has called them⁴²—help us reinvent Shakespeare in our own image.

Notes

- ¹ Unless otherwise stated, I quote from *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).
- ² A good starting point for scholarship on *Sir Thomas More* is T. H. Howard-Hill, *Shakespeare and Sir Thomas More: Essays on the Play and Its Shakespearean Interest* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
- ³ Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare's Modern Collaborators* (London: Continuum, 2008).
- ⁴ Helen Wilcox, “The Character of a Footnote . . . or, Annotation Revisited,” in *Arden: Editing Shakespeare*, ed. Ann Thompson and Gordon McMullan (London: Thomson, 2003), 199.
- ⁵ Charlotte Spivack, *The Comedy of Evil on Shakespeare's Stage* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1978), 14–15.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 139 and 172.
- ⁷ C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (London: Oxford University Press, 1942).
- ⁸ Neil Forsyth, “Evil and Literature: Grandeur and Nothingness,” in *Understanding Evil: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, ed. Margaret Sönsner Breen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), 4.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.
- ¹¹ *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 5, *Lectures 1808–19: On Literature*, ed. R. A. Foakes (London: Routledge, 1987), 2:315.
- ¹² A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: Macmillan, 1904).
- ¹³ “An Apology for the Character and Conduct of Iago,” in *Essays, by a Society of Gentlemen* (Exeter, 1796), 409.
- ¹⁴ Bernard Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil: The History of a Metaphor in Relation to His Major Villains* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 35.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

- ¹⁶ Samuel Johnson, “Preface to Shakespeare,” *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, ed. Arthur Sherbo (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 7:71.
- ¹⁷ Johnson, “Notes on Shakespeare's Plays: Othello,” *Yale Edition of the Works*, 8:1047.
- ¹⁸ Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation and Authorship, 1660–1789* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).
- ¹⁹ For scholarship on Shakespeare and Shakespeare editions in the eighteenth century, see Margreta de Grazia, *Shakespeare Verbatim: The Reproduction of Authenticity and the 1790 Apparatus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Dobson, *Making of the National Poet*; Simon Jarvis, *Scholars and Gentlemen: Shakespearean Textual Criticism and the Representation of Scholarly Labour, 1725–1765* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); *Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Peter Sabor and Fiona Ritchie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Peter Seary, *Lewis Theobald and the Editing of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Arthur Sherbo, *Samuel Johnson: Editor of Shakespeare* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956); Gary Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare: A Culture History from the Restoration to the Present* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989); and Marcus Walsh, *Shakespeare, Milton, and Eighteenth-Century Literary Editing: The Beginnings of Interpretative Scholarship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- ²⁰ Stanley Wells, editor's note to *Shakespeare Survey* 35 (1982): v.
- ²¹ Andrew Murphy, *Shakespeare in Print: A History and Chronology of Shakespeare Editing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 167.
- ²² See, however, Murphy, *Shakespeare in Print*, 188–207, on “Nineteenth-Century Popular Editions” of Shakespeare; and Murphy, *Shakespeare for the People: Working-Class Readers, 1800–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
- ²³ “Notes on Shakespeare's Plays: King Lear,” *Yale Edition of the Works*, 8:704.
- ²⁴ Michael Neill, “Unproper Beds: Race, Adultery, and the Hideous in *Othello*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40 (1989): 383–412, 403.
- ²⁵ Lynda Boose, “Othello's Handkerchief: ‘The Recognizance and Pledge of Love,’” *English Literary Renaissance* 5 (1975): 360–74.
- ²⁶ Johnson, “Preface to Shakespeare,” *Yale Edition of the Works*, 7:111.
- ²⁷ John Edwards, “Absent Footnotes,” *The Times Literary Supplement*, June 24, 2005, 17.
- ²⁸ A. C. Hamilton, “The Philosophy of the Footnote,” in *Editing Poetry from Spenser to Dryden*, ed. A. H. de Quehen (New York: Garland, 1981).
- ²⁹ Johnson, “Preface to Shakespeare,” *Yale Edition of the Works*, 7:110.
- ³⁰ Michael Cordner, “Annotation and Performance in Shakespeare,” *Essays in Criticism* 46 (1996): 289–301, 291.
- ³¹ Laurie E. Maguire, “Feminist Editing and the Body of the Text,” in *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. Dymna Callaghan (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 71.
- ³² Wilcox, “Character of a Footnote,” 205.

³³ Originally published in weekly numbers from February 1864 to March 1868, the edition was reissued in three volumes as *Cassell's Illustrated Shakespeare* (with illustrations by H. C. Selous). It was reprinted in 1875 as *The Plays of William Shakespeare* (London, Paris, and New York: Cassell, Petter & Galpin), also in three volumes (I quote from this edition). These volumes are unnumbered, but they are devoted to the tragedies, comedies, and histories respectively. Several years earlier, Mary Cowden Clarke had published *Shakespeare's Works, Edited with a Scrupulous Revision of the Text* (1860), an unannotated edition. Many years earlier still Charles Cowden Clarke had introduced John Keats to George Chapman's translation of Homer, which prompted Keats to write the famous sonnet "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer." Keats also addressed a verse epistle "To Charles Cowden Clarke" (September 1816). See Richard Altick, *The Cowden Clarkes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948).

³⁴ See Janet Adelman, "'Born of Woman': Fantasies of Maternal Power in *Macbeth*," in *Cannibals, Witches, and Divorce: Estranging the Renaissance*, ed. Marjorie Garber (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

³⁵ Franco Zeffirelli, "Filming Shakespeare," in *Staging Shakespeare: Seminars on Production Problems*, ed. Glenn Loney (New York: Garland, 1990), 244-45.

³⁶ It is also noticeable elsewhere how Victorian family ideology impacts the editorial mediation of Shakespeare's characters. While the Cowden Clarkes exonerate Lady Macbeth on the grounds that she is a "faithful wife" (340), Cunningham, in his short introduction to *Antony and Cleopatra* (1853), holds that "Antony . . . is justly punished for his perfidy to his two wives, Fulvia and Octavia" (xxx).

³⁷ Johnson, "Notes on Shakespeare's Plays: Othello," *Yale Edition of the Works*, 8:1047.

³⁸ Johnson, "Preface to Shakespeare," *Yale Edition of the Works*, 7:71.

³⁹ Forsyth, "Evil and Literature," 7.

⁴⁰ Johnson, "Preface to Shakespeare," *Yale Edition of the Works*, 7:71.

⁴¹ Johnson, "Notes on Shakespeare's Plays: King Lear," *Yale Edition of the Works*, 8:704.

⁴² Gary Taylor, introduction to *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion*, by Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett, and William Montgomery (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 7.

DEVILISH AND DIVINE ECONOMIES IN (AND AFTER) *PARADISE LOST*

RICHARD WASWO

Although some recent and not-so-recent criticism has attempted to place Milton's work in the context of, respectively, seventeenth-century arguments about trade and the emerging capitalist mode of production,¹ not much attention has been paid to the idea and operation of "economy" in his great epic. And this for the very good reason that such notions and concerns are not (with one large exception) obvious in the poem. Indeed, the whole subject of *Paradise Lost*, as the narrative moves from hell to heaven to Eden and back, would seem to have very little to do with any mundane management of material resources or commerce or finance. And when it does touch on such concerns, the poem presents them as diabolic in origin.

Especially diabolic when considered as the technological creation of wealth—which we might well call the motor of modernity, from the hydraulic mill through the steam engine to the gigabyte. Satan himself invents artillery—the beginning of the end for chivalric feudalism—in heaven.² And in hell the devils proceed to create and establish pretty much everything that we might recognize as ordinary human technology, music, art, philosophy, sport, and geographical discovery. Responding to their leader's call to arms—"Awake, arise, or be forever fall'n" (*PL*, 1.330)—the devils assemble, with colors, trophies, shields, and spears, to the marching music of trumpets, flutes, recorders, and pipes (531-59). Mammon, "the least erected Spirit that fell" (679), supervises the mining of riches and the forging of metals, using the thermal energy of the infernal earth, from which arises the magnificent Doric temple of Pandemonium, filled with sculptures in cornice and frieze, lighted "by subtle Magic," and designed by Heaven's ex-foremost architect, Mulciber (700-51). Here the devils exhibit their rhetorical eloquence and Satan his political skill in getting his lieutenant to propose the course of action he had himself suggested earlier: "by fraud or guile" (646) to corrupt God's new creation. Sole volunteer for this perilous mission, Satan takes off,