Gary Taylor once began an article with a cut-and-dried statement of the problem that he wished to highlight: ‘Women may read Shakespeare, but men edit him. So it has been from the beginning, and so it remains.’ But this story is far more complex, and far more consequential, than it has seemed. Between 1800 and 1950, at least sixty-nine women in the United Kingdom and the United States edited Shakespeare. Their output of over 100 editions – some of single plays, some of complete works, with many others falling somewhere in between – does not square with the generally held understanding, as laid out by Taylor, that women have never edited Shakespeare in significant numbers. Taylor’s misapprehensions are understandable; the gender imbalance in editing has always been significant, and it was particularly egregious by the last quarter of the twentieth century. So how did the number of women editors decrease so significantly during the twentieth century, and why were most women editors of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries excluded from the editorial record?

The first element of the answer involves the assessment of nineteenth-century editors by modern critics. The current conception of the scholarly editor’s role developed during the twentieth century as part of an immensely influential academic movement: the New Bibliography. Setting aside modern opinions on the validity of its principles, the New Bibliography fundamentally changed how scholars thought about textual studies and editing, formalising new methods of analytical bibliography and instituting a new focus on the search for ‘ideal copy’ that reflected the author’s intentions, as interpreted by the editors. Because of the depth of that influence, there is a tendency when considering editors who worked prior to the New Bibliography to judge them against what are now considered the basic tenets of scholarly editing. Those who displayed recognisably ‘modern’ practices in their work earn plaudits, while those who now seem outdated are chided, mocked, or ignored. Discussing editorial intervention in the Shakespearean text prior to Rowe’s edition
of 1709, Sonia Massai notes that although the topic has not been entirely neglected, previous work has focused on ‘exceptional examples which can best be understood as precursors of the editorial tradition associated with eighteenth-century editors’, a trend which she attributes to ‘a teleological desire which foregrounds familiar (and therefore properly editorial) strategies at the expense of ... much wider and more representative textual practices’. Massai’s work attempts to fill the gap between early modern printing house practices and the dawn of ‘modern’ editing in the eighteenth century; however, the paradigm shift between nineteenth-century and current editorial practice is also profound, and Massai’s point transfers neatly across to this later context. Nineteenth-century editors were not presciently operating according to principles still decades away from articulation, and although they worked between two eras of intense and influential editorial work, the nineteenth century was by no means a fallow period in editorial history. Paul Salzman has recently called into question past judgements of nineteenth-century editorial work, and this book echoes his claims that this era of the Shakespearean editorial tradition deserves greater consideration. Demanding proleptic modernity from nineteenth-century editors results in an unjustified elision of a large span of important editorial activity.

So, appropriating Massai’s phrasing, what does it mean to be ‘properly editorial’? Does one particular element of the editorial process, taken on its own, make the person doing it an editor? Or is it a confluence of tasks that cumulatively earns one the title? Must one prepare the text and write the notes/commentary and compose the introduction to be called an editor? Taylor writes critically of the problematic paradigm he sees as the root of the gender imbalance in editing:

Textual scholars generally believe that textual scholarship is the most important activity of academic humanism: it constructs the foundation upon which all other literary interpretation is built. Textual scholars – by recovering, editing, and publishing classical texts – made possible the Renaissance itself. Within this value system, editing is work, criticism is play; editing is primary, criticism is parasitic. This value system can easily overlay another: men work, men are primary; women are idle, parasitic, secondary. The paucity of female editors reflects and reinforces the sexist myth that men do the scientific problem-solving, while women indulge in various forms of ‘appreciation’: men make, women interpret.

While Taylor’s article undoubtedly arises from good intentions, it rests on shaky historical grounds, and his language and conclusions reinforce the gendered division of labour that he wants to critique. To fully parse the
complex factors at play here, consider the word ‘work’ in two senses: work, as in the labour involved in producing something, and work, as in the thing produced. Work-as-process and work-as-product, both verb and noun. In both senses, work can be gendered – gendered labour and the gendered text. Although these concepts are inextricably linked, considering them separately enables a better understanding of their interplay.

Taylor’s critique of the textual/critical binary relies on assumptions about gendered labour. He describes Elizabeth Inchbald and Anne Barton, who wrote introductions to plays but did not perform the work of collation/emendation, as playing the part of “the good hostess,” introducing readers to editors. The man does the work, and the woman takes care of the social arrangements.7 Taylor’s assessment that it is unfair that women were allowed to do only part of the job, and not the most important part at that, is problematic on two fronts. First, it reinforces the paradigm according to which the traditional textual work of collation and emendation is the most serious and important element of editing – the editing is the ‘work’, and the introduction is the ‘play’; therefore, the ‘social arrangements’ are the less important element. Second, it completely disregards historical context. Inchbald did not select or prepare the texts used for British Theatre, but like Johnson or Pope during the previous century, her name was a major selling point, and her critical introductions distinguished the series from its competitors. Anne Barton wrote the introductions to the comedies for the 1974 edition of The Riverside Shakespeare, the text of which was prepared by G. Blakemore Evans; however, Barton was only one of six scholars who wrote critical introductions or essays for the volume. The other five were men, but Taylor singles out only Barton as an underappreciated ‘hostess’.8

A significant aspect of recent feminist thought involves reappraising the value of the emotional/social labour more often taken on by women, bringing it up to par in importance with more traditional (male-oriented) work. Viewed through this new lens, the traditionally ‘social’ elements of editorial work take on new significance. If the writer of the introduction is indeed the hostess for the rest of the edition, we should also remember that women have, throughout history, exerted significant political and cultural power through the role of hostess – establishing literary salons, setting the tone for political gatherings, bestowing financial or political patronage.9 A well-placed, canny woman has often been able to influence events via her ‘social’ privileges. Take, for example, the case of a woman who seems to have been chosen very specifically to perform those ‘hostess’ tasks for a particular play. Between 1906 and 1909, New York publisher George
D. Sproul produced the Renaissance Shakespeare under Sidney Lee’s general editorship. Lee wrote the general introduction and annotations, while authors and scholars such as Edmund Gosse, Algernon Charles Swinburne, and Henry James wrote introductions for individual plays. The list of editors was a who’s who of the fin de siècle literary world, and all the names were male except for one – Alice Meynell.  

Essayist and poet Meynell, a well-known suffragist, wrote the introduction for *The Taming of the Shrew* for the Renaissance series. Meynell was the only woman to write an introduction in this series, and she wrote on arguably the most gender-problematic play in the Shakespeare canon. Meynell derides critics who attempt to analyse *Shrew* seriously, singling out Mary Cowden Clarke’s *Girlhood of Shakespeare’s Heroines* for its unfortunate attempts to understand and explain Katharine’s character. Any attempt to delve too deep into *Shrew* reveals the appalling truth of the situation, she explains:

Granting [Cowden Clarke], then, that the heroine of a tender story, a sentimental shrew honestly in need of love and a respectable master, is appropriately to be tamed by famine, cold, ignominy, insolence, and violence, to what end are these rigours practised in the play? To what end but to make of her a hypocrite – her husband the while happy to have her so? For a woman who feigns, under menace, to see a young maid where an old man stands, or a sun where the moon shines, is no other. Katharine does this for fear of the repetition of outrage – more famine, more cold, more contempt, at the hands of the strong man: the strong man of her girlish dreams, quotha!

Attacking the ‘feminine’ Shakespeare of the previous generation, characterised by the sentimental character criticism of writers like Cowden Clarke, Anna Jameson, and Helena Faucit, Meynell offers a particular approach to the play, priming the reader to approach it from a specific angle. Sidney Lee clearly selected well-known, established literary figures to write the introductions for this series, and both Lee and many readers would likely have been aware of Meynell’s social, political, and intellectual leanings, which formed a major part of her public identity. An advertisement for Lee’s later Caxton Edition, which used the same introductions, stresses that, thanks to their varied backgrounds, ‘every school of thought and critical temper is represented among the contributors’, and, of the forty-one contributors, Meynell was one of only twenty whose portraits were included in the advertisement, signalling her market appeal and name recognition. As the writer of the introduction, does she qualify as an editor? In the old paradigm, which distinguishes social/frivolous/female
labour from real/serious/male labour, she would not. But in cases like this, where the writer of the introduction seems to have been selected specifically for the play in question, the shaping influence of the introduction and its inextricability from the overall edition become obvious. Meynell’s authorship of that editorial element is crucial to the edition as a whole. She should not be considered ‘less than’ general editor Sidney Lee.

Returning to the question of why women’s contributions to editing have been neglected, a second part of the answer lies in the creation of a hierarchy of editions that occurs, in part, as a consequence of the procedures used for collation. Collation is the process by which textual variants are recorded and reported. Although collation protocols differ between series, the basic procedure involves comparing every iteration of a text and noting all the variations. Collation is recorded and explained through textual notes. Modern textual notes emphasise the originator of a textual emendation or conjecture, as is consistent with our overwhelming concern with intellectual property, a preoccupation dating back to the proprietary attitudes established by the Tonson publishing cartel in the eighteenth century.15 Margreta de Grazia describes textual notes as ‘a format for attribution, registering critical as opposed to literary property’.16 In notes, the abbreviation ‘subst.’ means that another edition ‘substantially’ used the same conjecture for the basis of an emendation, with only minor differences not affecting the overall sense of the emendation. The all-important ‘this edn’ marks an original emendation. If an edition is not considered to be textually ‘significant’ or original, it is not generally included in collation, and therefore does not appear in textual notes.

An editor of Shakespeare must be strategic in choosing which editions to collate because she is limited by the realities of time, space, publishing practice, and human endurance. As Leah Marcus has said, ‘Ars longa, vita brevis: there is only so much primary textual investigation that any given scholar can be expected to accomplish.’17 According to one estimate, producing an edition of a play in the Arden series already requires the collation of between forty-five and ninety texts.18 In the Handbook for the New Variorum Shakespeare, probably the most critically and textually expansive editions of Shakespeare ever produced, Richard Knowles writes that ‘in general, editions should not be fully collated unless they are of real importance to our understanding of the text and its history’.19 One could argue that ‘real importance’ is a subjective criterion – indeed, the Handbook goes on to say that each variorum editor must make these judgements for herself. The point is reinforced by Philip Gaskell in his classic work on editing: ‘Neither can there be any rules governing the
extent to which textual annotation should be carried out. Important variants, no doubt, should be annotated, but only the editor can decide which of the variants are important.²⁰

Recent studies have shown, however, that editing is a conservative practice, with each edition being substantially and often surreptitiously shaped by the editions that preceded it.²¹ It is a rare editor who, embarking on the arduous process of textual collation, will not look to previous editions to see what their predecessors considered important. In doing so, however, they risk the creation of a self-perpetuating system of exclusions, shaped by generations of subjective judgements of the kind that Knowles and Gaskell describe. Comparably, when Taylor writes that ‘[between 1970 and 1990] women have been responsible for important editions of a few plays . . . and less important editions of a few more’, his criteria for measuring ‘importance’ are likely influenced by the judgements of past editors.²² I currently know of twenty-two unique editions of As You Like It edited by women and published before 1950. This makes it the largest data set in my research. In the recent Arden³ edition of the play, Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke’s Cassell edition is the only woman-edited, pre-1950 text collated. The same is true for the most recent New Cambridge and Oxford editions. Knowles’s Variorum edition, which breaks texts down into three categories based on frequency of use, includes no women in the ‘most used’ category, has only the Cowden Clarke’s Cassell edition in the middle category (texts which are ‘occasionally quoted in the textual notes and in the appendix or their notes quoted in the commentary’), and in the final category (never quoted in textual notes, but cited for critical material) lists editions by Katharine Lee Bates, Charlotte Endymion Porter and Helen Archibald Clarke, Martha Hale Shackford, Cecily Boas, and Isabel J. Bisson. This accounts for fewer than half of the women-edited editions I am aware of, even if we exclude dramatically expurgated editions from the final count. So which editions make the cut? And how do the criteria of selection relate to the exclusion of women from the editorial tradition?

Women and the Domestic Text

That question brings us to a discussion of gendered work-as-product. This book makes extensive use of the label ‘domestic text’ to describe a subset of Shakespeare editions intended for women, children, and working-class readers that is often left out of the editorial record. Although no word perfectly encompasses the elements of this somewhat disparate grouping,
‘domestic’ emerged as the most effective option during my research. ‘Domestic’ offers a slightly more neutral characterisation than options such as ‘feminine’ or ‘low’, and as Georgianna Ziegler has pointed out, ‘home was the major location where most people first experienced Shakespeare’s plays and poetry’. This quote from an 1847 article in *Fraser’s Magazine* demonstrates how the three audiences could be combined into one domestic image:

> Book-love is a home-feeling – a sweet bond of family union – and a never-failing source of domestic enjoyment. It sheds a charm on the quiet fireside, unlocks the hidden sympathies of human hearts, beguiles the weary hours of sickness or solitude, and unites kindred spirits in a sweet companionship of sentiment and idea. It sheds a gentle and humanising influence over its votaries, and woos even sorrow itself into a temporary forgetfulness. Book-love is the good angel that keeps watch by the poor man’s hearth, and hallows it; saving him from the temptations that lurk beyond its charmed circle; giving him new thoughts and noble aspirations, and lifting him, as it were, from the mere mechanical drudgery of his every-day occupation. The wife blesses it, as she sits smiling and sewing, alternately listening to her husband’s voice, or hushing the child upon her knee. She blesses it for keeping him near her, and making him cheerful, and manly, and kind-hearted, – albeit understanding little of what he reads, and reverencing it for that reason all the more in him.

Here, the poor man, the wife, and the chattering child join together to reap the benefits of literature. Distinctions between target audiences were important factors in the development of Shakespeare editions in the nineteenth century, and modern critics have found various linkages among these three groups. Erica Hateley has pointed out that the genre of children’s literature, particularly children’s Shakespeare, has a ‘history of conflating “ladies” and “youths” as an implied audience’, while Mary Hammond notes that when publishing inexpensive texts for working-class readers, ‘publishers tended . . . to assume a patriarchal, teacherly role’, and that ‘the protection of these “innocent” readers [young students, women, and the self-educated] was very much a nineteenth century trope’. Janet Bottoms has linked publications for women, children, and the working classes as three of the major strands in the development of methods of teaching the plays and of Shakespeare’s place in the curriculum.

The sizeable and lucrative market for commercially produced domestic Shakespeare is best known for its products aimed at children. Georgianna Ziegler has traced the market for children’s Shakespeare back to the 1720s, revealing a rich history that encompassed excerpt books and expurgated
editions as well as chapbooks, paper dolls, and toy theatres.\textsuperscript{28} During the nineteenth century, influenced by changing educational philosophies and the growth of mass literacy, publishing companies began investing extensively in these products. In 1807, two books appeared that would deeply influence the world of Shakespeare publishing, both originating largely with female creators – Charles and Mary Lamb’s *Tales from Shakespeare* and Henrietta Bowdler’s *Family Shakespeare*. Although Mary wrote the majority of the *Tales*, the original imprints listed Charles Lamb as the sole author, thereby avoiding any negative publicity that might derive from Mary’s well-known psychotic episode, during which she killed their mother.\textsuperscript{29} The anonymous Bowdler edition, originally published in a small batch by a Bath publisher, did not achieve popularity until Henrietta’s brother Thomas convinced a London publisher to re-release it in an expanded form under his name. Although Thomas has therefore received most of the credit (and the blame) for the *Family Shakespeare*, the idea originated with Henrietta, and many of her edits survive in the re-released edition and its subsequent revised printings.\textsuperscript{30} These two books exemplify the tradition of nineteenth-century domestic Shakespeare.

Both books grew out of the impulse to make the works of Shakespeare available to those who could not previously access or understand them. The Lambs’ *Tales* focused on the combined market of women and children, particularly female children; by the second edition, the ‘Advertisement’ section described them as ‘not so precisely adapted for the amusement of mere children, as for an acceptable and improving present to young ladies advancing to the state of womanhood’.\textsuperscript{31} Bottoms suggests that even during composition, ‘the Lambs’ dual aim caused them to substitute simple plotlines for children but to focus their stories on the women whenever possible’.\textsuperscript{32} Both the *Tales* and *The Family Shakespeare* frame themselves in relation to a male authority controlling access to Shakespeare. The Lambs suggest that after a girl read the *Tales* to get a sense of the story, her brother, having access to the complete Shakespeare, could

read to them (carefully selecting what is proper for a young sister’s ear) some passage which has pleased them in one of these stories, in the very words of the scene from which it is taken; and it is hoped they will find that the beautiful extracts, the select passages they may choose to give their sisters, in this way will be much better relished and understood.\textsuperscript{33}

The introduction to the Bowdler text explains that the edition is intended to replicate the mediated transmission methods of the Bowdlers’ childhood, in which a discriminating father exercised his good taste while
reading Shakespeare aloud to the family, avoiding any immodest material that might provoke ‘blushes’. Both introductions therefore acknowledge the incompleteness of the text offered, and the necessity of a qualified mediator to dispense a sanctioned, sanitised version of Shakespeare.

As a result of that perceived necessity, the spectre of expurgation haunts domestic editions, making them easily dismissed, criticised, or mocked. Expurgated texts violate editorial norms by insisting on the visibility of the editor’s intervention in the ‘authorial’ text. They refuse to allow the reader to indulge in the fantasy of direct, unmediated access to the author. This issue has been described by Sonia Massai and Jonathan Bate in relation to adaptation:

The figure of the author is still very powerful, and the further a text departs from the author’s holograph, the more marginal and negligible it becomes to the critic’s attention. Editing is particularly affected by this prejudice, in that the editor’s task is generally identified with the recovery of a partially lost original: a transcendental drive leads editors to try and fill the gap left by the disappearance of the natural author at the center of his work.

The most famous expurgator of Shakespeare was a woman, and she (unintentionally) gave her name to the practice of expurgation on moral grounds. Henrietta Bowdler was the first woman to bowdlerise Shakespeare, and she was by no means the last. In her initial edition of the *Family Shakespeare*, published in 1807, Bowdler employed both aesthetic and moral judgement in her expurgations, cutting parts of the text that she found uninteresting in addition to those that were, one might say, too interesting.

So as ‘innocent’ populations gained increased access to Shakespeare, cultural gatekeepers responded by making judgements regarding which parts of Shakespeare were safe and appropriate for the new readers, and even what elements they were most likely to enjoy. Access to printed Shakespeare was no longer contingent on parental approval – school boards and teachers now shared that responsibility. A working-class reader could acquire an inexpensive ‘shilling Shakespeare’ of their own. The images presented by the Lambs and Bowdlers of a male relative mediating contact for girls still existed, but a new social context also emerged: reading in a classroom with other children, overseen by a teacher. New approaches involved some trial and error, as demonstrated by a professor at Queen’s College, London, in the 1890s, whose student later recalled that
‘We Have Lost Our Labour’

[we were] reading the sleep-walking scene in *Macbeth* when the Professor held up his hand: ‘Ladies, before proceeding further we will turn to the next page. We will count one, two, three lines from the top. We will count one, two words in this line. We will erase or cross out the second word and substitute the word “thou”. This line will then read “Out thou spot. Out I say.”’

The more efficient solution to this problem was to remove offending words prior to printing, and the popularity of expurgation as a defensive position meant that most domestic editions suffered from a lack of textual ‘wholeness’ that some found troubling. Some objected out of a desire to protect the sanctity of the Shakespeare text, accusing expurgators of ‘mutilating’ or even ‘castrating’ the text, removing from it the things that made it male. One reviewer of the Cowden Clarke’s expurgated Cassell edition wondered, ‘if we begin to rewrite Shakespeare, where is the operation to end?’

Given that Bowdler’s edition was far from the most extreme example of expurgated female-edited Shakespeare in the nineteenth century, certain aspects of this concern are understandable. Feeling that Bowdler had been overly conservative in her cutting, Rosa Baughan prepared her own version of the text. The resulting *Shakespeare’s Plays Abridged and Revised for the Use of Girls*, published in two volumes by T. J. Allman in 1863 and 1871, retains only the bare minimum of Shakespeare. Volume 1, containing the ‘Tragedies and Historical Plays’, is a meagre, insubstantial book. *Hamlet* occupies only fifteen pages; Baughan dispenses with *Romeo and Juliet* in just nine. She writes in her introduction that her initial intention was to publish a book of selections from Shakespeare in the style of the popular nineteenth-century excerpt books, the most famous of which was William Dodd’s * Beauties of Shakespeare*. Baughan recognised that, had she executed her plan, ‘one of the greatest charms of Shakespeare – the fitness of the sentiment in the mouth of the speaker – would be entirely lost’, so she chose instead to produce a severely expurgated edition. She admitted that comedy was the primary victim of her expurgation, comedic scenes being where ‘the greatest freedom of expression is to be found’, but Baughan believed that the humour would be ‘the quality least appreciable by the class of readers for whom I have laboured’. In other words, the girls wouldn’t get the jokes anyway.

As for prose adaptations, the Lambs themselves recognised the dangers of offering an incomplete Shakespeare to someone experiencing the plays for the first time, expressing the wish in their Preface that
if [the Tales] be fortunately so done as to prove delightful to any of the young readers it is hoped that no worse effect will result than to make them wish themselves a little older, that they may be allowed to read the Plays at full length (such a wish will be neither peevish nor irrational).46

Others criticised editors and adaptors who admitted to the missing elements, and thus highlighted their existence. One review of the Lambs’ Tales complained about ‘the language of the preface, where girls are told that there are parts in Shakespeare improper for them to read at one age, though they may be allowed to read them at another. This only serves as a stimulus to juvenile curiosity, which requires a bridle rather than a spur.’47

In poet Emily Dickinson’s Shakespeare reading group, the men suggested that they go through all the copies of the plays and mark out anything ‘questionable’. The women rejected this idea, informing the men that they did not want those ‘questionable’ things emphasised, and that they would read everything. Dickinson herself haughtily told them that ‘there’s nothing wicked in Shakespeare, and if there is I don’t want to know it’.48

New strategies evolved to counter both concerns. One solution was to use the Lambs’ Tales, or similar prose versions, in concert with expurgated texts or extracts in order to offer narrative contexts to students without access to the full text.49 Leah Price has described expurgations and abridgements as ‘photographic negatives’, explaining that ‘each retains what the other discards’.50 Seen in this light, a pairing of the two could be seen as creating the complete picture. An example of this dual approach is Mary Atkinson Maurice’s Readings from the Plays of Shakespeare, in Illustration of His Characters (1848), in which Maurice’s own prose narratives were paired with expurgated texts. This volume has, until now, been tentatively identified as being edited by the Winkworth sisters.51 This attribution is incorrect, and the mistake demonstrates how challenging ascription can be when working on women authors with limited bodies of known work. The title page says only that the book was ‘Edited by the Author of “Aids to Development [sic];” “Memorials of Two Sisters;” “Mothers and Governesses;” &c. &c.’ Although there is a book entitled Memorials of Two Sisters (1908) about the Winkworth sisters, the dates do not allow for the same author to have edited Readings (1848) and written Mothers and Governesses (1848). The elder Winkworth sister would have been only twenty-one at that time. The author of the other two books, as well as a different book called Memorials of Two Sisters (1837), was education reformer Mary Atkinson Maurice.

Maurice represents an interesting link to the larger world of education, for both girls and the working class. A lifelong teacher, Maurice ran her
own schools in Southampton and Reading before moving to London, where she became deeply involved with Queen’s College, London (an institution pioneering education for girls), and the Governesses’ Benevolent Institution. Both were early examples of the push for better education for girls in general, and more extensive preparation and support for women teachers specifically. Maurice’s brother, Frederick Denison Maurice, served as the first principal of Queen’s College and went on to found the Working Men’s College as part of a group that also included Frederick Furnivall. In the introduction to Readings, Maurice described previous efforts to avoid ‘indelicacy’ in Shakespeare as leading to publications that ‘give no more notion of the magnificent whole, than a few pebbles picked from the sea-shore, or a bottle filled with salt water, would convey to one who had never seen it, an idea of the grand and boundless ocean’. Bundling expurgated texts with prose stories offered a way to allow the reader a better idea of ‘the magnificent whole’ without sacrificing propriety.

**Gendered Text, Gendered Labour**

Despite some objections, expurgation proved to be a particularly persistent feature of student and domestic editions well into the twentieth century, and the association between expurgation and castration exemplifies the troubled intersection between the gendered text and gendered labour. In a Western context, ‘domestic’ is almost inevitably a word with gendered connotations, and the inclination to gender texts, like the inclination to gender types of labour – that is, critical/feminine versus textual/masculine – is problematic. Editing as a discipline, and the theory surrounding it, is steeped in deeply gendered concepts. The language used to describe texts themselves often betrays its inherent biases. The binary foundations of many New Bibliographical concepts – good/bad, fair/foul – lend themselves to gendered readings. Leah Marcus points out that in Alfred Hart’s formulation,

> [t]he ‘bad’ quartos are gendered as feminine – they are lax and chatty rather than rigorously formed and poetic, reminding us of the vulgar gossiping of the immortal Sairey Gamp or the chattering irrelevancy of the inane Mrs. Nickleby’. Worse yet, they are sexually suspect – a prostitution of the ‘true’ text.

Criticising the eroticization and sexual violation inherent in Fredson Bowers’s famous desire to ‘strip the veil of print from the text’,
Holderness, Loughrey, and Murphy characterise ‘that virtually all-male club the New Bibliographers’ as a group that ‘evidently cherished beneath their respectable tweed jackets a perverse desire to ravish the printed text in order to release the perfect female body enclosed within it’.58 In the 1987 Textual Companion to the Oxford Shakespeare, Gary Taylor called editors the ‘pimps of discourse’ and equated the text with a diseased female prostitute.59 In 1970, Chaucer editor E. Talbot Donaldson embarked on a particularly fraught envisioning of the editorial task. It is worth quoting in full in order to demonstrate how far flights of rhetorical cleverness can lead critics into blatant sexism. Like a woman, no text is perfect in its natural state, says Donaldson:

after careful analysis of the textual situation and long thought about the meaning, the editor, not unlike a bachelor choosing a bride, selects Line Form A for his text. For a time he lives in virtuous serenity, pleased with his decision. A year or more passes, and then one day it comes to him, like a bolt from the blue, that he should, of course, have chosen Line Form B; in short, he married the wrong girl. She is attractive, she is plausible, she has her points, but he just can’t live with her; he lies awake at nights enumerating her faults, which seem considerable when she is compared with her rejected rival, who now appears infinitely preferable. So the editor (who is the least reliable of all possible husbands) obtains a divorce – an enormously expensive one, since it forces him to change his apparatus and also to worry endlessly whether other decisions he has made have not depended on this one (and, as in matrimony, he will find that they have), so that they will have to be changed, too. His marriage with Line Form B is now consecrated, and he settles down to live happily ever after. Then after a year or so, Wife B begins to prove incompatible in a different and even more annoying way than Wife A; and it occurs to him that if he could find someone who had the best characteristics of both A and B, without their objectionable traits, he could be truly happy. The editor is uniquely privileged to be able to bring this dream-girl into existence by amalgamating A and B, which he does, and then weds this AxB after another expensive divorce. But the chances are that by now he is less illusioned about the excellence of his judgment in choosing wives, and while he likes his third one basically, he is prepared to expect that as time passes he may want to make a few changes in her. And at what time in his life will he be ready to say that he is fully and permanently satisfied with his choice? Never, until he stops thinking entirely.50

So even after the editor engages in the Pygmalion fantasy of conflation to create his ‘dream-girl’, only death can bring an end to his search for the perfect woman/text. These examples support editor Ann Thompson’s assertion that ‘the typical rhetorical stance of the male editor is aloof,
patronising and overtly or covertly misogynistic’ and that ‘editors are frequently more sexist than the text’. In 2019, Laurie Maguire and Emma Smith reflected on the continued use of gendered metaphors in textual studies, concluding that the trope continues to have ‘a dispiriting longevity’.

Ultimately, all of these rhetorical conceits require the critic to ascribe humanity to the text. Laurie Maguire has discussed the persistent tendency to anthropomorphise texts, to ‘present [them] as abused (orphaned, abandoned, mistreated) or nurtured (adopted, bandaged, patronized)’. By anthropomorphising texts, Maguire suggests, we create a dynamic in which ‘texts, like human beings, have parents, become orphans, seek guardians’. The deeply rooted perceptions of sexual dimorphism in the traditional Western world view mean that when something is characterised as ‘human’, possessing parents and able to reproduce, it is often assigned a binary gender identity. In his Lacanian reading of editorial authority, Clayton Delery recognises that the gender binary inflects the author/text/editor/reader relationship, but he is too quick to elide author with book, and to label them both as symbolically male. As seen in Hart’s, Bowers’s, Donaldson’s, and Taylor’s formulations, and as explored by Wendy Wall, the text, particularly the imperfect or ‘corrupted’ text, is often portrayed as female. Not only that, but female touch itself could be depicted as corrupting, as seen in the review of Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke’s edition in which the reviewer blamed ‘the lady editor’ for the text’s ‘alterations, mutilations, [and] corruptions’.

For a male-authored book to be purely male, it would have to be an inviolable object, entirely closed to outside influences; however, as Robert Darnton has pointed out, a book is part of a larger communications circuit, or communications web, in Helen Smith’s more nuanced analogy. The boundaries of a book are less brick walls than semi-permeable membranes, open to osmotic transfer between the book itself and its surroundings. In Smith’s words, ‘the gender of the text can only be the result of the numerous sexed encounters and acts which constitute its making and reception’. The symbolic genders of all actors in the web affect the symbolic gender of the book. Delery suggests that student editions are ‘most phallic and most dependent upon traditional notions of patriarchal authority’ because they most entirely veil their textual castration (imperfection); however, when placed within Smith’s web, the ‘feminine’ nature of the intended student audience exerts sway over the process of making the book and the gender of the eventual product. Furthermore, Delery’s analysis implies that the author and editor are
always symbolically male. How does this change when the author or, more relevant to this case, the editor is literally female?

The involvement of female agents thoroughly disrupts the fantasy of parthenogenesis central to the traditional Western conception of authorship. Issues of fertility and potency arise constantly in discussions of authorship and editorship, and despite its Lacanian inflections in Delery’s analysis, castration was an image that emerged in editorial discourse long before the advent of Freud. In response to a suggestion that he expurgate John Dryden’s work in the edition he was preparing, Sir Walter Scott wrote that ‘I will not castrate John Dryden. I would as soon castrate my own father... What would you say to any man who would castrate Shakespeare, or Massinger, or Beaumont and Fletcher?’ Thomas Bowdler, the most famous example of an editor charged with ‘castrating’ Shakespeare, responded with outrage and offense to the accusation, but how much more complicated might those accusations have been if the critics had known that the original castrator was Henrietta? Despite Thomas Bowdler’s annexation and revision of the project, the Family Shakespeare’s female roots are important. When they are taken into account, the Bowdler text feels unintentionally subversive, despite the editor’s stated aim of recreating the traditional paternal voice of Shakespearian authority. The cosy domesticity of the imagined scene, in which the father reads aloud to the family, prudently editing to preserve modesty, feels disrupted; there is a kind of editorial puppet act taking place when a female voice interjects itself into the male-authorised transmission of Shakespeare. To borrow Delery’s Lacanian language, Henrietta has disrupted the inheritance of the phallus.

Inheritance and legacy are key concepts in the language of textual criticism. German philology deeply influenced the development of English textual studies, and with it came the Lachmannian formulations of textual genetics. K. K. Ruthven writes that ‘stemmatism, with its “filiation” of texts, ... seems to betray only too patently a displacement into the realm of scholarship of a characteristically patriarchal anxiety about legitimacy of descent, related in turn to nineteenth-century notions of property and inheritance’. Just as a genealogist creates a family tree as a convenient graphic for organising the most basic facts of a person’s origins, a textual scholar might employ stemmata to illustrate the relationships between texts. As David Greetham points out, this representation of taxonomy is inherently patriarchal in its assumption of a ‘nonsexual, parthenogenic biology of descent’ that requires the occlusion of the matrilineal line for the sake of two-dimensional representation. In The
Calculus of Variants, W. W. Greg explicitly acknowledges that conceptualising textual reproduction as parthenogenic is necessary to his method of mapping a textual family tree. In his Prolegomena, R. B. McKerrow is even more blatant, providing this explanation for the difference between ‘monogenous’ and ‘polygenous’ series of texts: “The “monogenous” series may be considered as the equivalent of a family of father, son, grandson, great-grandson, &c., the father being still alive; the “polygenous” group to a family of brothers whose father is dead and each of whom may be the head of a family of his own.” Joseph Grigely has taken Greetham’s criticism a step farther, condemning many of the practices of editing as ‘textual eugenics’ and drawing connections between the focus on textual purity in the work of early and mid-twentieth-century bibliographers and the language and principles of Social Darwinism and other manifestations of eugenics.

Women are similarly erased from the wider symbolic ‘family’ of Western authorship. Just as the editorial tradition places textual witnesses into family trees, so authors are often placed, to their detriment or benefit, in positions of kinship and inheritance with their predecessors and their successors – ‘heir to Milton’, ‘Shakespeare’s son’, and so on. These relationships are primarily, although not exclusively, male-oriented, reflecting the standard Western system of patrilineal inheritance. In her book tracing the history of the kinship metaphor in literary biography, Jane Spencer explains that

Women . . . are not expected to be artistic creators in the highest or spiritual sense. Nor do they have a clear place in literary genealogies. Kinship, in the Western world, is the organizing principle for inheritance, and the trope of inheritance is central to the idea of literary history. The patrilineal model of inheritance, based on ancient sources and still influencing cultural ideas today, has obviously made women’s place within literature problematic, to say the least.

Spencer relates this paradigm to the Aristotelian theory of conception, in which ‘the male was the agent of generation, the female its passive receptacle’. Sperm, the animating agent, activates the ‘inert’ maternal contribution. In other words, the man provides the generative, creative element, the woman the mechanical vessel of transmission. Both uses of stemmatism leave ‘female’ texts and women authors and editors in a critical catch-22. In the first, they are corrupt/corrupting, and ‘corruption’ must be stamped out, leaving neither the corrupt female bodies of problematic texts nor the ‘corrupting’ hand of the female editor with any place in an idealised family tree. In the second, they are passive and non-
generative and therefore irrelevant to the overall picture, easy to ignore in favour of emphasising the ‘significant’ or dominant genetic lines. Either paradigm leaves female editors and texts vulnerable to the same result: erasure.

The process of simplification is the enemy of women in textual history. As Bonnie Smith and Sonia Massai each point out, the urge to tell a complete, coherent story with a strong, forward trajectory leads to the elision of anything that does not fit that narrative. Domestic texts, and the women who created them, do not fit this teleological trajectory. ‘Castrated’ and feminised, aimed at less elite readers, they lacked many of the markers that distinguished ‘important’ editions of Shakespeare in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some domestic editions are regularly included in textual notes – Charles Knight’s illustrated edition, for example – but most are not. They have been treated as spinster texts, dead-end branches of the textual family tree, pruned off to serve short-sighted critical interpretations and editorial pragmatism. Previous accounts of the editorial tradition have overvalued the generative aspect of editions by considering them ‘important’ only if they demonstrate clear, textual innovation, the type of originality that can be claimed with ‘this edn’ in the textual notes. Using outdated concepts of creative generativity, they have equated value with originality, innovation, or genius, excluding work, in the sense of both product and process, which does not fit into that ideal. By seeking anachronistic modernity in textual work, we doom ourselves to an almost exclusively male editorial tradition. Instead, it is vital to acknowledge that all editions are rooted in radically mixed motives, and that different processes of preparation, each tailored to the goals of a specific edition, can all fall under the definition of ‘editing’.

It is hard to imagine editions like The Boudoir Shakespeare alongside Johnson, Clark and Wright, and Malone, and I do not contend that all domestic editions should be added to those ranks. They were created under different conditions and for different purposes and should not be judged or measured by the same criteria. In a student edition, for example, the preparation of the text may not be the most important part of the editorial task. But all editions share the same basic aim of presenting Shakespeare, in some form, to the reader, and it is vital to consider, in Leah Marcus’s words, ‘the subtle, pervasive rhetorical power exerted by the editions we use’. This is particularly true of the editions in which readers encounter Shakespeare for the first time. In an article tracing the influence of Shakespeare in schools, Janet Bottoms pointed out that the classroom is ‘one of the most powerful forces at work upon [the idea of Shakespeare]’.
Many people first read the plays in domestic editions; therefore, those editions deserve attention, consideration, and analysis – as do their editors. Jerome McGann writes that ‘every new edition, including every critical edition, is an act of re-imagining and redefining a text’s audience(s) and its ways of interacting with those audience(s)’. The principles of the social text suggest that every text is an iteration of the ‘work’ that deserves acknowledgement in its own right; in Grigely’s words, every edition is a ‘moment of inscription’ that is ‘unique, and in its uniqueness, telling’. If this is true, then the editor of each text must be considered under the same democratising principles – each one telling in her uniqueness.

Notes

8 The others were Hallett Smith (introductions to romances and poems), Frank Kermode (introductions to tragedies), Harry Levin (general introduction), Herschel Baker (introductions to histories), and Charles H. Shattuck (essay on Elizabethan theatre). Another woman, Dr Marie Edel, was employed by Houghton Mifflin to assist with the edition; she was ultimately listed as an editor and co-wrote the notes to the comedies with G. Blakemore Evans.
10 Murphy, Shakespeare in Print, pp. 369–79.

In *Girlhood*, Cowden Clarke writes backstories for Shakespeare’s heroines that conclude with their first appearance in their plays. They tend to be simultaneously earnest and melodramatic, but after a long period during which they were out of fashion, critics have recently mined *Girlhood* to find deeper thought and meaning. In particular, see the work of Sarah Barber, Erica Hateley, Gail Marshall, Ann Thompson, and George C. Gross.

William Shakespeare, Alice Meynell, and Sidney Lee, *The Taming of the Shrew*, Renaissance Shakespeare (New York: George D. Sproul, 1907), VII, p. xii. Meynell’s message may have been relatively progressive, but it certainly did not avoid classism – she claims that in her time, such a shrew may exist in ‘the alleys of the town’ but not in the country house (p. xiii).

‘Advertisement for the Caxton Edition of the Complete Works of Shakespeare’ (Caxton Publishing Company, undated), David Nichol Smith Papers, Osborn Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, Box 2, Folder 11.


In 1796, Mary Lamb stabbed her mother in the heart. The traditional explanation for the sudden violence was that 'the accumulated strain of nursing a senile father and a bedridden mother, while also maintaining the family through her needlework, had exacerbated a psychological disorder subsequently categorised by her brother’s twentieth-century biographers as a manic-depressive illness’. Charles took custody of his sister, and they remained devoted partners throughout their lives, although Mary did periodically have to return to private madhouses due to relapses. Jane Aaron, ‘Lamb, Mary Anne (1764–1847), Children’s Writer’, in Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/15918.


Quoted in Flint, *The Woman Reader*, p. 129; a similar logic can be found behind the concept of the *index expurgatorius*. Beginning in the sixteenth century, censors produced lists of heresies or other material in need of expurgation in printed books, with the intention that the reader would use the index to find the prohibited lines and cross them out. Paul Saenger, ‘Benito Arias Montano and the Evolving Notion of Locus in Sixteenth-Century Printed Books’, *Word & Image*, 17.1–2 (2001), 119–37.


Baughan became better known for her writing on palmistry, astrology, physiognomy, and graphology.


Lamb and Lamb, *Tales from Shakespeare*, p. xviii.
‘We Have Lost Our Labour’


54 Perrin, *Dr. Bowdler’s Legacy*, pp. 255, 265.

55 For an overview of this issue, including additional examples, see Laurie Maguire and Emma Smith, ‘On Editing’, *Shakespeare*, 15.3 (2019), 293–309.


57 Marcus, *Unediting the Renaissance*, p. 102.


64 Maguire, ‘Alice Walker’, p. 327.


Quoted in Thompson and Roberts, ‘Mary Cowden Clarke’, p. 179.


Delery, ‘The Subject Presumed to Know’, p. 70.


Spencer, Literary Relations, p. 11.

Spencer, Literary Relations, p. 11.


Marcus, Unediting the Renaissance, p. 3.


Grigely, Textualterity, p. 95.