

Text, Stage, and Page: Garrick, Johnson, and the Editing of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the Eighteenth Century

Texto, escenario y página: Garrick, Johnson y la edición de *Sueño de una noche de verano* de Shakespeare en el siglo XVIII

Paula Baldwin Lind

Universidad de los Andes, Chile

pbaldwin@uandes.cl

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2043-9304>

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Abstract

This article examines two contemporary eighteenth-century editions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare: David Garrick's stage adaptation (1763) and Samuel Johnson's critical edition (1765). Challenging the view that textual variation is primarily explained by chronological distance from the moment of authorship, the study argues that such variations respond chiefly to specific cultural, commercial, and interpretative aims. The analysis is structured around the concepts of authorial intention and editorial intention, showing how each editor negotiates Shakespeare's authority in different ways. Garrick, working from theatrical practice, treats the play as a flexible and functional text: he introduces cuts, simplifications, and structural adjustments to ensure dramatic effectiveness and audience reception. His approach is grounded in stage experience and privileges economy and immediacy. Johnson, by contrast, belongs to the scholarly tradition that seeks to establish and stabilise the text through an extensive critical apparatus of notes and commentary that mediate its meaning. Although they differ in their editorial principles and strategies, both participate in a shared cultural horizon that aims to affirm Shakespeare as a central figure in the British literary canon.

Keywords: Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, authorial and editorial intention, theatrical adaptation, critical edition.

Resumen

Este artículo examina dos ediciones contemporáneas de *A Midsummer Night's Dream* de William Shakespeare en el siglo XVIII: la adaptación escénica de David Garrick (1763) y la edición crítica de Samuel Johnson (1765). Frente a la idea de que la variación textual se explica principalmente por la distancia cronológica con respecto al momento autoral, el estudio sostiene que dichas variaciones responden, sobre todo, a objetivos culturales, comerciales e interpretativos específicos. El análisis se articula en torno a los conceptos de intención autoral e intención editorial, mostrando cómo cada editor negocia de manera distinta la autoridad de Shakespeare. Garrick, desde la práctica teatral, concibe la obra como un texto flexible y funcional: introduce cortes, simplificaciones y ajustes estructurales para asegurar la eficacia dramática y la recepción del público. Su trabajo se fundamenta en la experiencia escénica y privilegia la reducción y la inmediatez. Johnson, en cambio, se inscribe en la tradición erudita orientada a fijar y estabilizar el texto mediante un amplio aparato crítico de notas y comentarios que median su sentido. Aunque difieren en sus concepciones y estrategias editoriales, ambos participan de un mismo horizonte cultural que busca sostener a Shakespeare como figura central del canon literario británico.

Palabras clave: Shakespeare, *Sueño de una noche de verano*, intención autoral y editorial, adaptación teatral, edición crítica.

Introduction

Books were undoubtedly among the main vehicles for the dissemination of Renaissance culture, while theatrical performance constituted another crucial medium through which ideas circulated and acquired social meaning. Together, print and performance played a central role in circulating and consolidating new modes of thought across philosophy, religion, politics, art, science, and literature. Far from being inert objects, books function as active cultural agents; they transmit meaning across temporal and spatial boundaries, mediating between past, present, and future. At the same time, dramatic texts achieve cultural life not only through print but also through performance and reception. Bibliography, therefore, cannot be reduced to the study of books as mere material artefacts. As Sir Walter Greg famously argued, it is also “the science of the transmission of literary documents”¹. The study of books enables scholars to interpret the past, gain insight into authorial practices, understand specific historical moments, reconstruct processes of publishing, editing, and printing, and analyse readers’ responses. Equally, attention to performance reveals how texts were embodied, adapted, and experienced by audiences within specific historical contexts. In other words, bibliography allows us to explore how books generate meaning both through their material form as printed texts² and through their enactment in practice.

According to Ann Thompson, “different generations of readers require different things from editors”³. This statement foregrounds the reader as a central agent in the processes of textual formation and reformation. Texts do not exist only as the product of authorial or editorial decisions; rather, they reach completion through their reception by readers, who are the final recipients of texts. A work is written to be read, just as a play is performed to be seen. However, this does not imply that readers or audiences possess absolute authority over texts. To grant such authority would risk transforming texts into excessively relative entities, dependent entirely on subjective interpretation.

Within these parameters, and always with due respect for authorial intention, editors and theatre practitioners may introduce what might be termed accidental or pragmatic changes, provided these do not alter the fundamental meaning of the work. This position becomes contentious if one assumes that any textual alteration necessarily constitutes an interpretation of authorial intention or of the copy-text. Such concerns are particularly relevant in the case of William Shakespeare (1564-1616), whose works survive in multiple, often conflicting textual forms and whose authorial involvement in their publication remains uncertain.

This article argues that textual variation in Shakespeare’s works during the eighteenth century is driven less by chronological distance from the authorial moment than by the distinct cultural, commercial, and interpretative objectives of editors and theatre practitioners. The objective of this study is to demonstrate how David Garrick’s adaptation of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1763) and Samuel Johnson’s edition of the same comedy in *The Plays of William Shakespeare* (1765) exemplify two parallel but divergent modes of textual transmission—one oriented toward performative efficiency and audience reception; the other toward scholarly preservation and expansion—thereby revealing editorial intention as a central force in the shaping of Shakespeare’s texts.

While Garrick’s and Johnson’s approaches to Shakespeare have attracted considerable scholarly attention, existing studies have generally focused on their biographies, individual editorial practices, and relationships with other eighteenth-century editors rather than on direct comparisons between the plays they edited. Foundational works such as *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation and Authorship, 1660-1769* by Michael Dobson examine the broader culture of eighteenth-century Shakespeare adaptation and editing, discussing both Garrick and Johnson within wider theatrical and editorial networks. Similarly, Peter Holland’s article “Editing for Performance: Dr Johnson and the Stage” considers Johnson’s editorial methods largely as a counterpoint to Garrick’s performative practices. Comparative studies centred on specific

plays, however, remain scarce. Some critical work has addressed *Macbeth*, and there is at least one comparative study related to *Hamlet* by Miki Iwata⁴. Still, no publication to date has examined Garrick's adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* alongside Johnson's edition, specifically through the lens of textual transmission. In this respect, the present article seeks to fill a modest but significant gap in scholarship on eighteenth-century Shakespeare editing and adaptation.

The significance of this pairing lies not only in the prominence of the two figures involved but also in the near contemporaneity of their respective interventions. Published within a span of two years, these works challenge any explanatory model that attributes textual variation primarily to chronological distance from the authorial moment. Instead, they foreground the role of performative and editorial intention as decisive factors in the shaping of this Shakespearean comedy.

Garrick's adaptation emerges from the theatrical tradition and is governed by the practical demands of performance. Prepared explicitly for the stage, his version treats Shakespeare's comedy not as a fixed literary object but as a malleable script. Cuts, rearrangements, and linguistic simplifications are introduced with the aim of producing dramatic coherence, emotional immediacy, and audience intelligibility. Garrick's intervention thus proceeds through reduction rather than expansion: elements deemed theatrically redundant or obscure are removed or reshaped to accommodate the expectations and sensibilities of an eighteenth-century playhouse audience. The authority underpinning this process does not derive from textual scholarship, but from theatrical experience and audience reception.

Johnson's edition, by contrast, belongs firmly to the scholarly editorial tradition that emerged in the eighteenth century, which intended to stabilise Shakespeare as a national literary author. His multi-volume work presents the plays as literary artefacts to be read, studied and interpreted. Johnson's extensive use of annotation, commentary, and critical apparatus does not seek to alter the dramatic text itself, but rather to mediate its meaning. Through explanatory notes, glosses, and contextual observations, the editor positions himself as an interpretative guide, acknowledging textual instability while simultaneously attempting to manage it. In this sense, Johnson's editorial practice operates through expansion: the play-text is surrounded, framed, and intellectually enlarged to facilitate understanding without compromising its linguistic or structural complexity.

What emerges from this comparison is not a hierarchy of textual legitimacy, but a clear illustration of how different modes of transmission generate different versions of the same work. Garrick and Johnson do not compete over fidelity to Shakespeare's authorial intention; rather, they respond to distinct cultural functions. Garrick addresses spectators, reactivating the play within a living theatrical economy. Johnson addresses readers, positioning Shakespeare within a learned tradition and reinforcing his literary status. Their divergent strategies—adaptation versus annotation; reduction versus expansion—demonstrate that textual transformation is not merely the consequence of error, corruption, or temporal decay, but often the result of deliberate, purpose-driven intervention.

Framing the Problem: Can We Speak of Authorial and Editorial Intentions?

The concept of authorial intention has become increasingly problematic in modern literary criticism, particularly in the case of Shakespeare. As John Drakakis observes, "in the aftermath of theories of 'subjectivity', can we talk seriously any more about the very kind of 'intention' that, in a slightly different discursive register, Wimsatt and Beardsley problematized?"⁵ This question destabilises any assumption that intention is a stable or recoverable origin of meaning and redirects critical attention toward the historical, material, and discursive conditions under which writing occurs. If, as Drakakis further asks, "we kill the author off, in the Barthesian, or even the Foucauldian sense of 'the author,' what are the conditions in which writing,

as an event, takes place?"⁶, then intention can no longer be understood as a private mental state but must be reconsidered as a function of textual production, circulation, and reception.

These theoretical difficulties are intensified in Shakespeare studies by the absence of direct documentary evidence, since the playwright left no diaries, letters, or explicit statements about his plays, and the works themselves survive in multiple, often divergent versions. Consequently, authorial intention cannot be treated as a fixed, recoverable set of meanings lodged in the author's mind. Rather, it has come to signify what may be inferred from the plays in relation to linguistic, theatrical, and cultural conventions of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, as well as the practical conditions of the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage. Even then, such reconstructions aim less at recovering Shakespeare's private meanings than at identifying the kinds of effects his texts were designed to produce for their original audiences, while acknowledging that these meanings remain open to historical reinterpretation. Drakakis's insistence that we define more precisely the kinds of writing Shakespeare's plays contain—whether "literary," "oral," or "theatrical"⁷—further complicates appeals to intention by foregrounding performance and textual hybridity: the text and its representation.

Critical responses to authorial intention reflect these tensions. Intentionalist critics such as E. D. Hirsch⁸ and A. C. Bradley⁹ maintain that interpretation should aim to recover what the author meant. In contrast, New Critics such as W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley dismiss intention as irrelevant or unknowable, famously identifying it as the "Intentional Fallacy"¹⁰. Structuralist and post-structuralist approaches, articulated by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault¹¹, go further, arguing that meaning is produced by language systems and discursive formations rather than by authorial agency. Reader-response theorists, including Stanley Fish¹² and Hans Robert Jauss, relocate literary meaning in acts of reception, rendering Shakespeare's intention secondary to the interpretive practices of audiences across time. Central to Jauss's theory is his concept of the "horizon of expectations": the historically and culturally shaped set of assumptions and prior knowledge that readers bring to a specific work at a given moment. It is this horizon, rather than authorial intention, that mediates how literature is received and understood across time. As Jauss explains, "the coherence of literature as an event is primarily mediated in the horizon of expectations of the literary experience of contemporary and later readers, critics, and authors. Whether it is possible to comprehend and represent the history of literature in its unique historicity depends on whether this horizon of expectations can be objectified"¹³. Taken together, all these approaches reveal not a consensus, but an ongoing displacement of intention from a foundational principle to a contested framework.

The problem is compounded at the level of textual transmission and editorial practice. As E. A. J. Honigsmann notes, some argue "that Shakespeare rewrote his plays many times, [...] others say that he wrote his plays only once, and behind each variant there lurks an incompetent scribe or a drunken compositor"¹⁴. Given this uncertainty and the precarious transmission history of the texts, traditional editorial theories grounded in authorial intention—such as those advanced by W. W. Greg¹⁵, Fredson T. Bowers¹⁶, and G. Thomas Tanselle¹⁷—face significant challenges. While Bowers claims that books are "significant in the order and manner of their shapes but indifferent in symbolic meaning"¹⁸, and Tanselle continues to privilege the original artist's creative intention, such positions struggle to account for revision, collaboration, and social mediation. By contrast, critics such as Jerome J. McGann and Donald F. McKenzie challenge the notion of the text as a stable, authorially fixed object and instead advance the concept of the socially constructed text, insisting that "the forms of texts affect their meanings"¹⁹. McGann argues for a decisive reorientation of textual editing and bibliographical scholarship toward the social and cultural determinants of textual production. His "socialization of the text"²⁰ echoes McKenzie's "sociology of the text"²¹, which seeks to analyse the social and technical conditions under which texts are produced and transmitted as constitutive elements of cultural history. Crucially, McKenzie expands the field of textual agency to include not only the

author but also editors, printers, publishers, and other participants in the production process. From this perspective, intention is dispersed, making the recovery of an ideal text a highly problematic, if not unattainable, goal.

In this model, the bibliographer is no longer merely a mediator striving to reconstruct a singular authorial intention, but an agent engaged with multiple textual forms and the proliferation of their meanings; furthermore, editorial practice cannot be neutral or purely restorative; rather, it inevitably participates in shaping interpretation. Editorial choice thus becomes inherently plural, since any given work may exist in a range of authorised forms, each materially and historically situated.

From the earliest stages in the history of Shakespeare's editions, questions of authorial intention and editorial intervention have been inextricably intertwined. The problem is intensified by the limited evidence concerning Shakespeare's compositional practices and by the complex, often unstable, transmission of his texts. Given these conditions, the assumption of textual fixity becomes difficult to sustain. If textual transformation can occur within an author's lifetime, as revision practices suggest, it follows that even more substantial alterations may emerge over extended periods of circulation and reproduction.

Positioned between strict authorial intentionalism and radical social constructivism, Philip Gaskell proposes a more pragmatic solution in his preference for the first edition as the copy-text, defined as the "printed edition which is closest in line of descent to the author's manuscript; that is followed in accidentals; and that is also followed in substantives unless there is evidence that the author's intentions would be more closely represented by other readings"²². While this principle offers methodological clarity, its application is rarely straightforward. Authors may revise their works for successive editions, each potentially bearing its own authority. Consequently, the editor's task involves not only bibliographical analysis but also critical judgment. After evaluating the historical and textual evidence, an editor may conclude that the final version does not necessarily represent the most critically valuable or coherent state of the work and may instead privilege an earlier textual form. In this sense, editorial practice emerges not as a mechanical recovery of origins but as an interpretative act situated within broader theoretical and historical debates.

The Rise of Shakespearean Editing and Theatrical Adaptation in the Eighteenth Century

In 1642, twenty-six years after Shakespeare's death, the Globe Theatre was closed, and public stage-plays were condemned as "Spectacles of pleasure, too commonly expressing lasciuious Mirth and Levitie"²³. However, this did not last long, since in 1660 Charles II officially sanctioned the restoration of English drama, granting warrants to build two theatres for the performance of plays. But even before this grant was issued, public performances of old plays had begun at an old theatre in Drury Lane²⁴.

Remarkably, the collected edition of Shakespeare's plays had not been reprinted since 1632; therefore, most Restoration readers suffered from a kind of collective amnesia and knew nearly nothing about their national poet. "Almost no publication, almost no performance, almost no biography, almost no criticism [...]"²⁵ of his works, explains Gary Taylor, was produced for many years, until, in the eighteenth century, his reputation was restored. In 1709, Jacob Tonson published Nicholas Rowe's edition of *The Works of Mr. William Shakespeare*; in 1711, and Thomas Johnson began issuing pocket-sized editions of the plays. Later, in 1725, Alexander Pope published his edition of Shakespeare's plays, followed by Theobald's in 1733 and Warburton's in 1747. By the end of the century, two other publications proved particularly important: Samuel Johnson's edition of Shakespeare's plays and Malone's *The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare*, which included the poems—later regarded as an integral part of the Shakespeare canon—and a chronology. The dates mentioned above do not include translations of the plays or the critical writings by various authors, but they give us an idea of the study of Shakespeare during that period.

At the same time as editors were reshaping Shakespeare on the page, the eighteenth century witnessed a proliferation of adaptations on the stage. These twin processes of rewriting and reinterpretation—textual and theatrical—produced what Michael Dobson has termed “adaptation and canonization”²⁶. As he argues, “so far from being contradictory processes, [they] were often mutually reinforcing ones: [...] the claiming of Shakespeare as an Enlightenment culture hero both profited from, and occasionally demanded, the substantial rewriting of his plays”²⁷. Canon formation, in other words, did not depend on textual fidelity; rather, Shakespeare’s elevation as a national poet was enabled by his continual refashioning to suit contemporary taste.

This dynamic is underscored by David Nichol Smith, who observes that throughout the eighteenth century, Shakespeare “dominated the stage”²⁸ and was more central to theatrical culture than he is today. Yet this dominance was mediated through adaptation. From Betterton to Garrick, Shakespeare’s plays were frequently performed in altered versions—“mangled versions”²⁹, as Smith calls them—of two main types: those that reshaped the plays to conform to classical decorum, and those that indulged in spectacular or pantomimic license. Some adaptations were produced by theorists who were intent on imposing neoclassical rules; others were driven by theatre managers responding pragmatically to audience demand. In either case, adaptation was not marginal but normative. Shakespeare’s theatrical authority in the eighteenth century was inseparable from his transformation.

David Wheeler shows that adaptation in this period differed markedly from later eras, particularly in what he calls the “sheer number of adaptations”. Between 1660 and 1820, he notes, “all thirty-seven of Shakespeare’s plays were revised, the total number of adaptations reaching at least 123. [...] the revised versions in many cases totally supplanted the originals”³⁰.

Textual scholarship in the twentieth century reveals a parallel logic. As Tiffany Stern explains, editors for much of the last century assumed that variant early texts pointed back to a single, lost, perfect archetype. Conflated editions attempted to reconstruct this hypothetical original by combining quarto and folio versions, even though such composite texts were never performed in the early modern playhouse. Only in the 1980s did scholars begin to reconsider the possibility that textual variation reflected revision over time rather than corruption³¹. Comparing versions instead of welding them together suggests that Shakespeare—or his company—habitually revised plays for performance. Surviving evidence indicates that post-performance alteration was a normal practice.

Andrew Gurr’s distinction between “maximal” and “minimal” texts offers a useful framework for understanding this process across periods. As he writes: “Every early playing company’s ideal was a ‘maximal’ text. It had a highly specific identity, and an absolutely authorizing function. It was the players’ manuscript that the Master of the Revels had read and ‘allowed’ for playing, and to which his signature was appended”³². This authorized “playscript” functioned as the company’s official copy. In practice, however, performances were usually based on “minimal” versions—texts trimmed and modified in response to local conditions, casting limitations, or practical constraints. The licensed book served as a financial and legal resource, but what appeared on stage was frequently abbreviated, rearranged, or otherwise adapted.

Seen in this light, eighteenth-century adaptations participate in a much longer tradition of theatrical revision. The culture that produced new critical editions of Shakespeare also generated a wide range of performative rewritings. Adaptation was therefore not an aberration from an established canon; rather, it was one of the principal means through which that canon was constructed, circulated, and sustained within Elizabethan and Jacobean theatrical culture from the outset. As Jenny Davidson argues, “eighteenth-century readers’ and theatregoers’ experiences of Shakespeare were profoundly and definitively affected by theatrical adaptations, both on the stage and in their printed versions”³³. This observation highlights how audiences often encountered Shakespeare not through an unaltered text but through mediated versions shaped by

theatrical practice, suggesting that adaptation played a decisive role in shaping the reception and cultural authority of his works.

Adaptation versus Edition

Different editions of literary works serve different readerships and pursue distinct editorial aims. Editors and publishers typically operate with a clear awareness of their intended audience and the purposes of their publications. Whether authors themselves always write with a particular readership in mind, however, remains uncertain. In the case of Shakespeare, it may be assumed that he had some sense of his audience, since he knew the venues where his company would perform and the types of spectators they would encounter. Nevertheless, the relationship between Shakespeare and the publication of his plays remains problematic. As David Scott Kastan argues, Shakespeare's published plays "[...] show no sign of Shakespeare's involvement"³⁴. He further observes that "only eighteen of his thirty-seven plays were published in his lifetime, and none in an edition that Shakespeare avowed as his own"³⁵.

To analyse the transmission of Shakespeare's works, I will compare two eighteenth-century versions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: David Garrick's theatrical adaptation (1763) and Samuel Johnson's edition of the play published in *The Plays of William Shakespeare in Eight Volumes* (1765). These texts represent different traditions within the reception of Shakespeare. Indeed, in Davidson's opinion, "the transformations of [this comedy] offer a good way of tracking trends in the stage adaptation of Shakespeare's plays, revealing both the preference for increasingly stimulating methods of staging (music, pageantry, acrobatics) and the extent of the textual changes intended to ease the cognitive and linguistic demands the play might place on contemporary audiences"³⁶.

As explained at the beginning of this article, these editions differ in several respects, primarily because Garrick's version belongs to the theatrical tradition. In contrast, Johnson's belongs to the textual and scholarly tradition. In effect, they function as separate works that illustrate how a dramatic text can be either "reduced" for theatrical performance or "enlarged" through editorial commentary and scholarly apparatus, in a sense analogous to that described by Gurr in his account of the playtexts by Shakespeare that were adapted and maintained by theatre companies for performance.

The comparison also reveals various linguistic and formal modifications, including changes in spelling, capitalisation, and stage directions. However, this article will not evaluate the texts in relation to their fidelity to the early quartos or folios of Shakespeare's plays. Such an analysis would require a broader textual comparison that goes beyond the scope of this research. Instead, this work adopts a synchronic approach, focusing on how these two eighteenth-century editions reinterpret the same play within their own historical and editorial contexts. In this way, the analysis aims to demonstrate that problems of textual transmission do not arise solely from the passage of time or from careless copying but are often closely related to the intentions and objectives of editors and adaptors.

At this point, it is worth turning to the ideas of Dobson, one of the leading scholars of Shakespearean adaptations in the eighteenth century. His argument helps clarify that the distinction between a scholarly edition and a performance adaptation of Shakespeare is less oppositional than it might seem. As he suggests, "adaptation and canonization, so far from being contradictory processes, were often mutually reinforcing ones"³⁷, since the elevation of Shakespeare as a cultural authority in the Enlightenment "both profited from, and occasionally demanded, the substantial rewriting of his plays"³⁸. This perspective reframes the apparent divide between editorial fidelity and theatrical innovation: rather than preserving versus distorting Shakespeare, both scholarly editors and theatrical adaptors participated in shaping his status and meaning for contemporary audiences.

This is evident when comparing Johnson and Garrick in their respective engagements with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Johnson's edition, though positioned as scholarly, still interprets and frames Shakespeare through Enlightenment critical values, while Garrick's performance adaptations make more explicit alterations. Yet both contribute to the same broader project of canonisation: rendering Shakespeare intelligible, respectable, and culturally central. In this sense, adaptation is not a departure from scholarship but one of its enabling conditions, reinforcing Dobson's claim that "rewriting Shakespeare" was often integral to securing his canonical authority. Garrick thus emerges not merely as a theatrical adaptor but as an editorial thinker, shaping Shakespeare's meaning through performance, while Johnson's editorial practice is likewise far from ideologically neutral, reflecting its own assumptions about taste, literary value, and cultural legitimacy.

Garrick (1717-1779) stands as a central figure in the eighteenth-century reconfiguration of Shakespeare, not merely as an interpreter but as an active mediator of the plays for contemporary audiences. Working at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane—where his adaptations were explicitly designed for performance—he combined the roles of actor, manager, and writer, and is frequently credited with consolidating Shakespeare's revival and public reputation. Educated by Johnson at Edial Hall³⁹, and later accompanying him to London in 1737, Garrick remained closely connected to emerging scholarly approaches even as his theatrical practice diverged from them. From 1747 to 1776, as manager of Drury Lane, he systematically reshaped Shakespeare's plays by reducing them to their principal plots and incorporating songs and spectacle, thereby enhancing their accessibility and popular appeal. As Taylor notes, "For Garrick, as an actor, what was seen mattered as much as what was spoken"⁴⁰; his adaptations thus privileged visual and performative immediacy over textual completeness. However, this strategy also exposes a tension: while Garrick sought to popularise Shakespeare, his interventions risked simplifying the plays in ways that sat uneasily with an increasingly scholarly literary culture.

By contrast, Johnson (1709-1784) represents the parallel movement toward textual authority and critical stabilisation. As a literary critic, lexicographer, and editor, he participates in a broader Enlightenment project to fix, explain, and canonise Shakespeare's text for readers. Yet, rather than constituting a simple opposition, these two approaches reveal complementary modes of mediation. The present analysis, therefore, begins from the premise that both Garrick's adaptations and Johnson's edition function as material and interpretive constructs. Examining these works as physical artefacts—through their layout, format, typography, paper, and binding—underscores how meaning is produced not only through textual content but also through form. Detailed descriptions of these features are provided in Appendices 1 and 2, allowing for a more precise understanding of how each version participates in shaping Shakespeare's eighteenth-century reception.

Two Eighteenth-century Editions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

The earliest adaptations of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* emerged in the mid-seventeenth century in the form of short comic "drolls,"⁴¹ such as *The Merry Conceited Humors of Bottom the Weaver* (c. 1640s; published 1661), attributed to Robert Cox. Produced outside official theatres during the Puritan prohibition, these pieces isolated popular comic elements—especially the "mechanicals" and the *Pyramus and Thisbe* episode—which quickly became a detachable and flexible part of the text. This material could be performed independently or inserted into other works, demonstrating the play's early malleability. By the Restoration, adaptation took on a more elaborate form with *The Fairy Queen: an Opera* (1692), with music by Henry Purcell and likely text by Elkanah Settle. This version functioned as a pastiche, combining fragments of Shakespeare with newly composed songs and emphasising spectacle through elaborate staging, scenic transformations, and mechanical effects, reflecting contemporary interest in opera as a hybrid form of "singing, Dancing, and Machines interwoven"⁴².

In the eighteenth century, adaptations continued to reshape this comedy through musical and metatheatrical experimentation. *Pyramus and Thisbe: A Mock-Opera* (1745) reworked the play-within-a-play structure into a more self-conscious theatrical frame, aligning it with later satirical traditions. Meanwhile, Garrick's 1755 musical adaptation and George Colman's rival version further illustrate the period's eclecticism, incorporating material from multiple authors, including John Milton, John Dryden, and Ben Jonson. These adaptations often justified their alterations by appealing to novelty, audience taste, and practical constraints such as performance length, while also revealing increasing caution about modifying Shakespeare's text. Across these repetitions, a consistent pattern emerges: the play's selective appropriation, hybridisation with other artistic forms, and reliance on spectacle and musical enhancement underscore its adaptability to changing theatrical conventions and audience expectations.

During the 1760s, writers increasingly proclaimed Shakespeare as the world's greatest dramatist and poet, a view echoed by actors who took pride in performing his works. At the same time, both theatrical production and editorial activity expanded significantly. Editors sought to preserve the past as fully as possible, incorporating notes from earlier editions and remnants of Elizabethan culture. This emphasis on documentary authenticity, however, often generated dissatisfaction with contemporary performances. "Even when eighteenth-century admirers praised Garrick as 'the best commentator' on Shakespeare", as Taylor observes, "they were unconsciously proclaiming the primacy of the book; actors were judged as commentators, marginal servants of the printed text"⁴³. This raises the question of whether such a designation can be applied to Garrick himself, and whether his version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595-6) may be understood as a form of commentary on the original play.

Although Johnson's editorial treatment of this comedy and Garrick's adaptation of the play have each attracted significant scholarly attention, they have rarely been examined together. Studies of Garrick have largely emphasised his role as a theatrical interpreter of Shakespeare, while criticism of Johnson has focused on his editorial principles and neoclassical critical framework. Yet both figures confronted a common problem: how to mediate the play's tonal, structural, and imaginative irregularities for eighteenth-century audiences.

Scholarship on Garrick has consistently treated adaptation as a form of interpretation. George Winchester Stone identifies the 1763 adaptation by Garrick and George Colman as a major intervention in Shakespearean performance history, noting that, in the case of *The Fairies*, critics objected "less for his omissions and for his occasional rewordings than for the addition of twenty-eight songs to the text"⁴⁴. Such reactions suggest that Garrick's alterations were understood not merely as textual changes but as interpretive acts. Similarly, Pierre Degott argues that the adaptation participated in the eighteenth-century "return to Shakespeare" while reshaping the play according to contemporary theatrical taste. Garrick and Colman shortened passages, modernised language, and removed elaborate conceits, thereby managing what Georgian audiences perceived as the excesses of Shakespeare's poetry⁴⁵. More broadly, Degott contends that a play often regarded as metatheatrical was transformed into "a meta-operatic play dramatising the expressive potentialities of song and music"⁴⁶. Kathleen McLuskie likewise emphasises Garrick's ability to balance textual engagement with theatrical embodiment, arguing that he both participated in editorial debates and insisted on performance as a manifestation of Shakespearean genius⁴⁷.

By contrast, Johnson's engagement with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has generally been discussed through the lens of editorial criticism. His comments on the play reflect a well-known unease with Shakespeare's mixture of classical and fairy materials. In the *Preface to Shakespeare*, Johnson remarks that "the loves of Theseus and Hippolyta [are] combined with the Gothick mythology of fairies"⁴⁸, while elsewhere he characterises the comedy as "wild and fantastical"⁴⁹. Such observations have typically been read within his broader reflections on Shakespearean irregularity and genius.

What remains largely unexplored is the relationship between these two modes of response and, more specifically, the extent to which they shape the play's comic dimension. Since *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is fundamentally a comedy, questions of dramatic genre also emerge from such a comparison. Although the relationship between editorial and theatrical mediation has not been examined in terms of its impact on the play's comic dimension, this remains a promising area for future research. The present discussion, however, is concerned primarily with the broader interpretive strategies through which Johnson and Garrick addressed the play's perceived irregularities. Rather than representing opposing approaches, these editors reveal a shared eighteenth-century project of making Shakespeare intelligible and appealing to contemporary audiences while simultaneously redefining the comic possibilities of the play.

The number of early editions of the play is relatively well established⁵⁰. It was first printed in Quarto in 1600 by Thomas Fisher (Q1), probably set from autograph foul papers, shortly after its entry in the Stationers' Register:

8 Octobris [1600]

Thomas Fysshher.

Entred for his copie vnder the handes of Master Rodes

And the Wardens A booke called A mydsommer nightes Dreame. vjd.⁵¹

The edition was reprinted in 1619, falsely dated 1600, and again in the *First Folio* (1623), likely from a copy of the 1619 text that had been annotated for theatrical use. The title page of the first quarto (Q1) notes that the play had been "sundry times publicly acted", with an early court performance in 1604 under the title *A Play of Robin Goodfellow*. Thereafter, the play underwent numerous theatrical adaptations, as previously discussed, including Garrick's 1755 musical version: *The Fairies*. In 1763, he published a further adaptation—*A Midsummer Night's Dream. Written by William Shakespeare: with alterations and additions and several new songs. As it is performed at the Theatre-Royal in Drury Lane*—which, throughout the eighteenth century, was commonly staged as a form of musical entertainment.

In the case of Johnson, his edition of the Shakespearean comedy progressed slowly over many years. He had long contemplated the project and announced his intention in 1756 by publishing proposals for the new edition; however, many years passed before it finally appeared. At last, in October 1765, the promised edition was published.

The *Preface* attracted general admiration, but the edition itself disappointed readers' expectations; nevertheless, Johnson gave a significant impetus to the study of Shakespeare. He aimed to produce a final and definitive edition of Shakespeare's plays, as he suggests in his *Proposals*: "the edition now proposed [...] will exhibit all the observable varieties of all the copies that can be found"⁵²; furthermore, "all that is valuable will be adopted from every commentator, that posterity may consider it as including all the rest, and exhibiting whatever is hitherto known of the great father of the English drama"⁵³.

He argued for a contextualised evaluation and understanding of Shakespeare and assigned great responsibility to the editor's role. According to him, the editor should "endeavour to read the books which the author read, to trace his knowledge to its source, and compare his copies with the originals"⁵⁴. He also asserts the superior authority of the *First Folio* of 1623 as "the original" and follows it as the collating text.

According to Richard F. Kennedy, there were two distinct editions of Johnson's *Plays* of Shakespeare published by Tonson and others in 1765. He points out that

the first edition (JOHN 1) was published on 10 October, and the second (JOHN 2) “early in November”. The reason that the second edition followed so swiftly on the heels of the first was that there were 750 to 1000 subscribers, and a run of 1000 copies of the first edition, which left very few—if any—copies for the twelve booksellers to offer to the public, and so the second edition was started as early as 5 October 1765, five days before the publication of the first edition.⁵⁵

The first—and most revealing—contrast between Johnson’s edition and Garrick’s version of the play lies in their fundamentally different editorial purposes, as reflected in their material form. Johnson’s edition is issued as part of an eight-volume set, whereas Garrick’s appears as a single-volume work. Although both editions are formatted as octavos, Johnson’s multi-volume format is significantly less practical in terms of size and weight, reinforcing its function as a scholarly rather than a performative object. This distinction is not merely physical but ideological: Johnson situates the play within a collected and scholarly corpus, including it in the first volume alongside *The Tempest*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Measure for Measure*, and *The Merchant of Venice*. Significantly, these plays are not arranged chronologically, but rather, it seems, generically, suggesting an editorial logic that privileges thematic grouping over historical development.

Despite the density of annotation, Johnson’s edition cannot be classified as a variorum; however, it undoubtedly lays the groundwork for later variorum editions by Steevens, Reed, and Malone. Its scholarly ambition is evident in the range and type of its notes. As has been observed, “there are several kinds of explanatory notes, but there are two main kinds, [...] those which require historical knowledge, whether of events, or social conditions or habits, or books, or language; and [...] those which require knowledge of human nature”⁵⁶. This distinction underscores Johnson’s dual commitment to contextual and interpretative criticism. For instance, in the first act, his commentary on Quince’s line—“That’s all one, you shall play it in a masque; and you / may speak as small as you will” (1.2.45-46)⁵⁷—demonstrates his awareness of Elizabethan stage conventions. He includes a long note where he links the comic motif of mistaken identity among lovers to the theatrical practice of masking, whereby characters remain visually unrecognisable:

This passage shews how the want of women on the old Stage was supplied. If they had not a young man who could perform the part with a face that might pass for feminine, the character was acted in a mask, which was at that time a part of a Lady’s dress for much in use that it did give any unusual appearance to the Scene: and he that could modulate his voice in a female tone might play the woman very successfully⁵⁸.

However, the authority of Johnson’s editorial voice should not be overstated. Only eleven of the notes are his own, while the majority reproduce or synthesise the views of earlier editors. As Taylor argues, the edition

contains many judicious notes, which draw upon the linguistic knowledge Johnson accumulated in compiling his *Dictionary*, and upon his own considerable common sense; but its text does not mark any very noticeable advance on previous editions [after 1623: Tonson, Rowe, Pope, Theobald, Warburton]. The famous *Preface* is the best thing in it⁵⁹.

Thus, while Johnson demonstrates considerable learning—drawing on classical sources, English literature, and close observation of Shakespeare’s language—his contribution is uneven. His occasional critical interventions, such as his remark on “the fiery glow-worm’s eyes” (3.1.163)⁶⁰—“I know not how *Shakespeare*, who commonly derived his knowledge of nature from his own observation, happened to place the glow-worm’s light in his eyes, which is only in his tail”⁶¹—reveal both his attentiveness and his willingness to question Shakespeare’s authority.

From the perspective advanced by McGann and McKenzie, this collaborative texture undermines the notion of a singular, authorially grounded authority and instead exemplifies the “socialization of the text.” Johnson’s edition emerges not as the transparent recovery of Shakespeare’s intention, but as a layered construct shaped by successive acts of mediation: annotation, selection, and synthesis. In this sense, Johnson functions less as an originator than as a node within a broader network of textual production, confirming

McKenzie's claim that meaning is generated through the interaction of multiple agents, including editors and commentators.

At the same time, Johnson's editorial practice retains traces of the intentionalist tradition associated with Tanselle and Greg, insofar as it implicitly aspires to stabilise the text and clarify Shakespeare's meaning. This tension situates his work between competing models: while his reliance on earlier scholarship reflects the plurality emphasised by McGann, his critical interventions still gesture toward the recovery of an authoritative text, revealing the difficulty of fully abandoning intentionalist assumptions.

In terms of layout, the similarities between the two editions are superficial and ultimately mask greater functional differences. In both, speech lines are centred and unnumbered, and character names are abbreviated ("*The*" for Theseus, "*Ege*" for Egeus, etc.); however, Johnson's edition introduces a slight margin before character names and renders them consistently in italics, contributing to a more formal and structured visual organisation.

In the case of Titania, he designates her as "*Queen of the Fairies*"⁶². He consistently identifies her within the text by her title—"Queen"—rather than by her proper name, Titania. By contrast, Oberon, despite his status as "*King of the Fairies*"⁶³, is referred to by his name and, in keeping with the treatment of most characters, abbreviated to *Ob*. A similar pattern can be observed with Theseus, who appears under an abbreviated form of his proper name rather than being styled as the "Duke [of Athens]"⁶⁴. At the same time, Garrick does, at points, define these characters by their roles: he identifies Oberon as *Ob*. and Titania as "*Queen*", yet in the *Air* duet in 2.1, they are presented as "King" and "Queen". This shift highlights a broader inconsistency in his naming conventions.

Other typographical features—such as uniform typefaces, the placement of page numbers at the top of verso and recto pages, and the use of "guiding" words at the bottom right corner—are shared conventions of the period rather than meaningful points of divergence.

The most significant distinction lies in the presence or absence of annotation. Johnson's notes, often occupying more space than the dramatic text itself, are placed at the bottom of each page and actively shape the reader's interpretation. By contrast, Garrick's edition contains no notes whatsoever—not even a glossary—thereby privileging immediacy and performability over scholarly mediation.

A similar divergence is evident in the title pages. While both have been described in Appendices 1 and 2, their rhetorical strategies differ markedly. Johnson foregrounds the scholarly labour behind his edition, emphasising textual correction, explanation, and the integration of previous commentary, while also invoking his own name as a mark of authority. This self-positioning aligns, albeit imperfectly, with the editorial model described by Gaskell, in which the editor exercises critical judgment in selecting and organising textual materials, even while claiming proximity to an authoritative source.

By contrast, Garrick's title page appeals directly to theatrical authenticity and audience expectation. His framing of the text as an adaptation—"with alterations and additions and several new songs"—foregrounds performance over textual stability and explicitly acknowledges transformation as part of the work's identity. The second title page reinforces this performative orientation, announcing the play "as it is performed at the Theatre-Royal in Drury-Lane." From a McGann-McKenzie perspective, Garrick's version makes visible the social and material conditions of textual production: the play is not a fixed literary artefact, but a mutable script shaped by theatrical practice, audience reception, and commercial considerations.

Ultimately, these differences point to two distinct readerships and editorial philosophies, which can be understood as competing manifestations of the theories outlined above. Johnson's edition is addressed to scholars and critics, privileging textual authority, historical context, and interpretative depth—an approach that, despite its collaborative nature, still gestures toward the stabilisation of meaning. Garrick's version, by contrast, is oriented toward actors and theatre practitioners, as evidenced by its lack of annotation and its adaptive strategies. His interventions—variations in act and scene divisions, omission of characters,

incorporation of songs, and changes in spelling, punctuation, and stage directions—exemplify what McKenzie would identify as the constitutive role of material and social factors in shaping textual meaning.

In this light, the contrast between Johnson and Garrick does not simply reflect different editorial choices but reveals two fundamentally different conceptions of the text itself: one that seeks, however imperfectly, to recover and stabilise an authorial work, and another that embraces textual plurality and transformation as intrinsic to its existence. Their editions thus serve as concrete instances of the theoretical shift from author-centred textual criticism to the socially constructed text.

In terms of dramatic structure, both versions adhere to the conventional division into five acts (see Table 1). However, the musical adaptation contains fewer scenes per act, as Garrick not only condensed entire scenes but also cut lines within them. Although the fundamental elements of the plot remain intact—retaining almost the same narrative progression and main characters—these omissions inevitably strip away some of the poetry and richness of the original language. While such abridgement may be justified on practical grounds, particularly to reduce performance time, it comes at a cost: the loss of suspense and a diminished sense of wonder. Even though the songs continue to advance the plot, they cannot fully compensate for what is sacrificed in the process. That said, the musical numbers and staging offer a highly attractive spectacle, which may partly offset these losses for an early modern audience.

Table 1

Structural Comparison of Selected Editions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Edition	Act Structure	Scene Distribution	Total Number of Scenes	Status of Scene Divisions	Editorial Implications
<i>First Folio</i> (1623)	5 acts	1.2; 2.2; 3.2; 4.2; 5.1 (reconstructed)	9 (editorially inferred)	Scenes not explicitly marked; divisions derived from entrances and exits.	Indicates the absence of a fixed scene structure; supports the view (cf. McGann and McKenzie) that textual form is shaped through transmission and editorial intervention.
Samuel Johnson (1765)	5 acts	1.2; 2.2; 3.2; 4.2; 5.1	9	Scenes explicitly numbered and regularised.	Reflects an effort to stabilise the text and impose structural coherence; consistent with intentionalist editorial principles (cf. Tanselle), though still mediated by prior editions.
David Garrick (1763)	5 acts	1.2; 2.1; 3.1; 4.1; 5.1.	6	Scenes reduced. Songs (duets, choruses, etc. added).	Demonstrates adaptation to theatrical conditions; exemplifies the performative and socially embedded nature of the text (cf. McKenzie).

Some characters are omitted from Garrick's version—Philostrate, for instance. However, an inconsistency appears in the first act: Theseus refers to him even though he is neither present nor previously mentioned. In the opening scene, Theseus addresses him in his second speech: "Go, Philostrate, / Stir up th' Athenian youth to merriments" (1.1.11-12)⁶⁵.

In Johnson's opening, Philostrate is likewise absent from the stage, yet he is at least listed among the *dramatis personae* and included in the stage directions: "Enter Theseus, and Hippolita, Philostrate, with

Attendants" (1.1). Johnson also withholds proper names from the two Fairies he introduces into the comedy—one female, the other male. Beside the First Fairy, he notes the actress Miss Wright as the performer; similarly, he identifies the Second Fairy with the actor Master Raworth⁶⁶. Particularly striking is the fact that the role of Oberon is played by an actress, Miss Rogers.

Even though Shakespeare's original play incorporates songs, Garrick changes some of the singers—one fairy sings instead of many—and inserts plenty of other songs: five airs⁶⁷ (1.1), one song by Quince, Bottom, Snug and others (1.2), five airs, one air duet by Titania and Oberon (2.1), four airs and one air duet (3.1), eight airs and one duet air (4.1), five airs, one duet, one duet air, one chorus at the end of the play (5.1). There is little doubt that the comedy was transformed into a musical performance, with songs and dances as major attractions. This shift creates a more festive atmosphere and brings the fantastical characters to the fore. Nevertheless, the play appears to have remained too much of an ensemble piece to align fully with the conventions of eighteenth-century theatre.

There are also several variations in spelling across the texts. Due to space constraints, I will highlight only a few examples, such as "yoak" in Johnson and "yoke" in Garrick: "Unto his Lordship, to whose unwish'd yoke / My soul consents not to give sov'reignty" (1.1.81-82)⁶⁸. In these lines, spoken by Hermia, both variants of the word refer to "a contrivance, [...] by which two animals, esp. oxen are coupled together for drawing a plough or vehicle [...]"⁶⁹. Analogically speaking, she is probably referring to her virginity and the possibility of being subjected to a husband. Another interesting case occurs later in the same act in Garrick's version when Hermia alludes to her companions—"And thence from Athens turn away our eyes, / To seek new friends and strange companions" (1.1.219-220)⁷⁰—whereas Johnson's character refers to them as "Companies" (1.3) and explains that Shakespeare "very often uses *Companies* to signify *Companions*"⁷¹. In the theatrical context of Garrick's adaptation, there is little emphasis on any metatheatrical suggestion that the characters might be referring to a theatre company. Johnson, instead, draws explicit attention to this possibility because his reader does not see a performance and therefore must rely on such indirect commentary to evoke the stage.

In the second act of Garrick's text, the First Fairy declares that she can pass "Through bush, through brier" (2.1.3)⁷². However, when Puck participates in the play-within-the-play in 3.1, he uses "briar"⁷³, revealing a lack of orthographic consistency. On the contrary, Johnson prefers "briar" (2.1)⁷⁴ throughout, even pointing out in note 3 that Drayton used "brier". The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) treats these spellings as variants of the same word: "brier", meaning "a thick thorny bush"⁷⁵, which was more common in the sixteenth century, particularly in poetic usage. Later in the same act, when the jealous Oberon addresses Titania in Garrick's version, he refers to her attendant as "a little changling boy" (2.1.120)⁷⁶, whom he wishes to take into his service. The *OED* does not record "changling" as a standard variant of "changeling" (2.1.23), the form Johnson uses consistently in all three instances in his edition. Nevertheless, the *OED* defines "changeling" as "A person or thing (surreptitiously) put in exchange for another"⁷⁷, or as "a child secretly substituted for another in infancy; esp. a child (usually stupid or ugly) supposed to have been left by fairies in exchange for one stolen"⁷⁸. This definition aligns with the context, since the circumstances under which Titania acquired the Indian page are unclear. In this instance, however, the term is applied to the child taken rather than to the one left in exchange.

There is no space to discuss in detail the different uses of capital letters, punctuation, and hyphenation by each editor. Nevertheless, one particularly relevant feature is Garrick's repeated use of exclamation marks. This appears to function as a theatrical device, conveying an expressive force closely tied to performance. Whereas Johnson tends to use commas or semi-colons, Garrick's adaptation is marked by frequent exclamations, which likely signal shifts in vocal tone and produce a different effect in performance. For instance, when Hermia is

leaving her friends, she exclaims, “Farewel sweet play-fellow!” (1.1.220)⁷⁹, as she says goodbye to Lysander; similarly, when Quince assigns roles to the actors, he calls out, “Nick Bottom the weaver!” (1.2.16)⁸⁰.

With respect to stage directions, the differences are not as numerous as one might expect, given the distinct nature of the works. Nevertheless, some are worth noting. According to Greg, when considering the language of stage directions, we must bear in mind that most dramatists were familiar with theatrical conventions. He explains that “they tended to use the language of the stage. They write ‘within’ for what to the audience is ‘without’; their characters enter at several doors, though they may be meeting in a forest, or above or aloft that is on the balcony”⁸¹. He also analyses the range of descriptive directions used by Shakespeare, distinguishing those that identify characters at their first appearance –often defining their status and relationships; those indicating actions accompanying or following an entrance; prompts for gestures, attitudes, or even mental states; and, occasionally, descriptions of locations.

Contrary to what might be assumed, the number of stage directions in both editions is almost the same, both in quantity and in content. Variations are limited to minor differences such as “entrances” and “exits” or the omission of unnecessary information. For example, when the Queen and King are singing, Garrick omits the phrase following the comma: “[Exeunt Queen, and her train]”. In Act 3, however, he introduces a stage direction not found in Johnson’s text: when the Queen of Fairies is in the forest, just before the fairies begin to sing, he adds “[Goes to the Bower and lies down]”. Likewise, some indications for “soft music” present in Garrick are absent from Johnson. Garrick also appears to include more explicit cues—such as “waking”, “sings”, and “sleeps”—to guide the actors’ performance. In some instances, Garrick’s stage directions offer greater specificity. For example, instead of introducing the first scene simply as “A palace”, he writes “The Duke’s Palace in Athens.” He also characterizes Theseus more precisely, referring to him as “my gracious Duke” (1.1)⁸² rather than the more general “my noble Lord” (1.1).

There are also notable shifts in pronoun use. At the end of the first act, when the First Fairy is leaving, Garrick uses “we” instead of “he” (“...and here my mistress: Would, that we were gone!” (2.1.59)⁸³, suggesting that the character is referring to someone present onstage. Later, when Oberon instructs Puck to fetch a flower, he says “Fetch me this herb” (2.1.169)⁸⁴, instead of “that herb”, implying that the plant is probably physically present before the actor on the stage.

Conclusion

The comparison between Garrick’s adaptation and Johnson’s edition confirms the initial hypothesis: textual variation in Shakespeare is not primarily the result of chronological distance from an original, authorial moment, but rather the outcome of deliberate, context-driven intervention. Both editors operate within the same eighteenth-century cultural framework, yet their radically different aims—performance versus scholarship—generate equally distinct versions of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

Garrick refashions the play to heighten its direct impact, strengthen audience involvement, and ensure its effectiveness in performance, whereas Johnson elaborates and consolidates the text through extensive annotation, aiming to clarify its meaning and reinforce Shakespeare’s place within an established scholarly tradition. Together, their approaches demonstrate that editorial purpose is not incidental but fundamental to the shaping and transmission of Shakespeare’s texts.

From this perspective, the playwright’s works are not fixed artefacts but dynamic entities, continually moving from manuscript to quarto and folio, then to multiple editions and, very often, to the stage. This ongoing process suggests that there is, and perhaps can be, no single definitive version. Yet such fluidity does not entail the disappearance of the author or the erasure of authorial intention. On the contrary, each edition

engages with an underlying textual and imaginative foundation that it seeks, in different ways, to preserve, interpret, and transmit.

Rather than replacing the authorial basis, editorial interventions participate in a broader history of reinterpretation, shaped by shifting cultural, commercial, and intellectual priorities. As Shakespearean scholarship evolves, the importance of bibliographical and editorial study becomes increasingly evident, since textual transformations directly influence both meaning and literary value, even as they remain anchored in the originating vision of the playwright.

At the same time, the tension between text and performance remains unresolved. As Dobson observes, there is “an increasing consciousness of the distinction between Shakespeare as acted and Shakespeare as read”⁸⁵, a distinction clearly embodied in the divergent practices of Garrick and Johnson. Yet rather than viewing this tension as a problem to be solved, it may be more productive to see it as a defining feature of drama. As Laurie Maguire argues, “drama is a paradoxical genre, in as much as it has to be written before it can become an oral medium”⁸⁶, situating it between print and performance, stability and transformation.

In conclusion, neither Garrick's nor Johnson's version can be privileged as more authoritative; they belong instead to different interpretative levels, each addressing a distinct audience and fulfilling a specific function. Together, they illustrate the power and responsibility of editors and theatre practitioners in shaping Shakespeare's legacy. Then, the continual reinvention of his texts is not a sign of instability but of vitality. It is precisely through such acts of adaptation, annotation, and reinterpretation that Shakespeare's works remain alive.

At the same time, not all forms of variation carry the same weight. Variations in spelling, punctuation, or the addition of explanatory notes and songs do not in themselves constitute a deviation from the original; rather, they participate in the ongoing construction, transmission, and renewal of the canon. By contrast, changes to the structure of acts and scenes can substantially alter the rhythm, pacing, and overall coherence of the play, while the removal of scenes essential to the development of the action may disrupt its dramatic logic and comic effect. In Garrick's version, however, the introduction of songs—despite the cuts and omissions of certain scenes—serves to compensate for these losses, reconfiguring the dramatic material in such a way that the central magic and conflicts of the play are still effectively conveyed. For these reasons, adaptation and editorial practices must be grounded in a thorough knowledge of the play, the playwright, and the Elizabethan and Jacobean cultural and theatrical contexts in which the plays by Shakespeare were produced, including an understanding of early modern English and stage practices. Only through such informed engagement can reinterpretation remain both creative and responsible, preserving the integrity of the dramatic work while allowing it to speak to new audiences.

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APPENDIX 1

Johnson, Samuel, ed. *The Plays of William Shakespeare, in eight volumes, with the corrections and illustrations of various commentators; to which are added notes by Sam. Johnson*. London, 1765, vol.1 of 8.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 8v., plate: port.;8° (octavo of 19,5 x 12,5 cm)

TITLE PAGE:

THE | PLAYS | OF | WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, | IN EIGHT VOLUMES, | WITH THE |
CORRECTIONS and ILLUSTRATIONS | OF | Various COMMENTATORS; | To which are added |
NOTES by SAM. JOHNSON||

LONDON: | Printed for J. and R. Tonson, C. Corbet, H. Woodfall | J. Rivington, R. Baldwin, L. Hawes,
CLARK | and COLLINS, W. Johnston, T. Caslon, T. Lownds, | and the Executors of B. Dodd. | M, DCC,
LXV.

TITLE PAGE FOR THE FIRST VOLUME:

THE | PLAYS | OF | WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE | VOLUME the FIRST, | CONTAINING, | The
TEMPEST. | A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT's DREAM | The TWO GENTLEMEN of VERONA. |
MEASURE for MEASURE. | The MERCHANT of VENICE. ||

LONDON: | Printed for J. and R. Tonson, C. Corbet, [and all the others] | M, DCC, LXV.

TITLE PAGE FOR THE PLAY:

A | MIDSUMMER-NIGHT's | DREAM.

AUTHOR: Shakespeare, William (1564-1616)

LANGUAGE: English

PAGES: of the first volume: 675

PAPER: It looks hand-made, rough-surfaced, and off-white in colour. If it is held up to the light, it shows a pattern of broad-spaced lines (chain lines) that are crossed by lines that are close together (wire lines). There is no watermark.

TYPE FACES: They seem to be 114-15 mm Romans. Either Jenson's or Aldus's.

BINDING: There are two leaves of blank paper at each end of the book, which are of the same colour but of a different texture from the printed leaves. The boards are covered on the outside with leather. Some golden flowers are decorating the spine, and each volume has a short reference, and the volume is tooled in the spine. All of them read: JOHNSON'S | SHAKESPEARE | VOL: The number of this volume is in Roman numbers.

COLLATION and CONTENTS:

Collation: - vol. i. Portrait of Shakespeare; general title page to eight volumes, p.[i]; title page to vol. i, p [iii]; Johnson's Preface, pp. v-lxxii; other introductory matter, pp. [lxxiii] – clv (= clxxv).

The Preface by Johnson is followed by the dedication of John Heminge and Henry Condell to the Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery, and by their 'Preface to the Players.' Then come – Pope's Preface, Theobald's Preface, Sir T. Hanmer's preface, Dr. Warburton's preface, Rowe's Life of Shakespeare, Shakespeare's will, a note to the life, and the poem of Ben Jonson to Shakespeare. These are succeeded by the plays and an appendix (vol. viii) of additional notes. In this appendix are incorporated the observations of many of his friends – Thomas Warton, Sir John Hawkins, George Steevens, Langton, Chamier, Goldsmith, Reynolds, Percy, J.

Simpson, Esq. (probably Joseph Simpson), and Holt (John Holt, of Gray's Inn, who published in 1749 a pamphlet on *The Tempest*, and issued 'Proposals for publishing by subscription, Shakespear's Plays'). Last of all is an Appendix, giving a list by Steevens of the editions of Shakespeare's Plays.

Pages of Johnson's Preface are unnumbered. Then, all prefaces are identified with small letters (from i to ciii). Numbers start on page 4. The lines in the plays are also unnumbered.

EDITION:

Published in October 1765. The edition used is the one held by the English Faculty Library at the University of Oxford, England.

APPENDIX 2

Garrick, David. *A Midsummer Night's Dream. Written by William Shakespeare: with alterations and additions and several new songs. As it is performed at the Theatre-Royal in Drury Lane.* London, 1763.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 47, [1] p.; 8° (Octavo of 12,5 x 19,5 cm).

TITLE PAGE:

| A | Midsummer Night's Dream. | WRITTEN BY | SHAKESPEARE: | With ALTERATIONS and ADDITIONS | and several NEW SONGS. || [Price One Shilling.]

SECOND TITLE PAGE:

| A | Midsummer Night's Dream. | Written by | SHAKESPEARE: | With ALTERATIONS and ADDITIONS | and several NEW SONGS. | As it is Performed at the | THEATRE-ROYAL | In DRURY-LANE. || LONDON: | Printed for J. and R. TONSON in the Strand. | MDCCLXIII.

AUTHOR: William Shakespeare

LANGUAGE: English

PAGES: 45. Pages and lines in the play are unnumbered.

PAPER: The paper is rather thick, quite ordinary, and greyish in colour. There is no watermark.

TYPE FACES: 114 mm Romans?

BINDING: No binding visible. The copy does not preserve the original binding. It has been bound with a thin greenish paper, and it looks like a leaflet.

COLLATION AND CONTENTS: title pages [pp.3-4], Dramatis personae [p.6], Act I. scene I [pp.7-16], Act II. Scene I [pp.17-23], Act III. Scene I [pp.24-32], Act IV. Scene I [pp.33-40], Act V. Scene I [pp.41-47], A Table of Songs, with the names of several composers [unnumbered].

EDITION: The edition used is held at the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford and corresponds to the Harding D1996.

There is a 1764 edition (smaller format) at the Bodleian as well, published in one volume with other eight plays – musical dramas or operas: *Flora*, an Opera (J. Hippisley), then *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (D. Garrick), *The Rival Candidates* (H. Bate), *The Quaker* and *The Deserter* (C. Dibdin), *The Padlock* (I. Bickerstaffe), *Tony Lumpkin in Town*, *The Agreeable Surprise*, *The Dead Alive* (J. O'Keefe). It was printed in Dublin for P. Wilson, J. Exshaw, S. Price, and J. Potts, Booksellers, in *Dame Street*. MDCCLXIV.

Notes

- 1 W.W. Greg is quoted by Philip Gaskell in *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972; repr. 1985), 1. By literary documents we mean all documents, manuscript and printed, but also any document, disc, tape, or film where reproduction is involved and variant versions may result.
- 2 Print history is commonly divided into the hand-press period (c. 1500-1800) and the machine-press period (c. 1800-1950). While Shakespeare composed his plays in the early hand-press era, the editions discussed in this study

were published in 1763 and 1765, reflecting later eighteenth-century hand-press technologies and the material conditions of their production.

- 3 Ann Thompson, Thomas L. Berger, A. R. Braunmuller, Philip Edwards, and Lois Potter, *Which Shakespeare? A User's Guide to Editions* (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1992), 2.
- 4 Miki Iwata, "Johnson and Garrick on *Hamlet*." *Johnson in Japan* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2020), 88-104.
- 5 John Drakakis, "Intention and Editing," *Style* 44, no. 3 (2010): 365-77, esp. 375. Gabriel Egan similarly argues that key problems surrounding authorial intention in Shakespeare studies were articulated prior to Wimsatt and Beardsley's formulation of the "Intentional Fallacy," notably in the exchange of letters titled "The Genuine Text," initiated by C. S. Lewis in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1935.
- 6 Gabriel Egan, "Intention in the Editing of Shakespeare," *Style* 44, no. 3 (2010): 378-90, 378.
- 7 John Drakakis, "Intention and Editing", 375.
- 8 E. D. Hirsch, "In Defense of the Author", in *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1967), 1-23.
- 9 A. C. Bradley focuses on understanding the internal logic and character motivations as intended by Shakespeare, especially in: "The Substance of Shakespearean Tragedy" and "Shakespeare's Tragic Period-Hamlet", where he develops the concept of "intention". See *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: Macmillan & Co., 2nd ed. 1905), 5-39 and 79-128.
- 10 W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley. "The Intentional Fallacy." *Sewanee Review* 54 (1946): 468-88.
- 11 Gabriel Egan observes that contemporary debates on authorial intention in editing are shaped by French theory (Barthes, Foucault, Derrida), forming the intellectual basis of what is now called New Textualism, exemplified in the writings of Paul Werstine, Margreta de Grazia, and Randall McLeod, among others. Egan, "Intention in the Editing of Shakespeare." *Style* 44, no. 3 (2010): 378-90, 378.
- 12 Stanley Fish focuses on the reader's role in creating text interpretation. See "Is There a Text in This Class?", *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1980), 303-321.
- 13 Hans Robert Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory", in *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, Trans. Timothy Bahti; Introd. Paul de Man (Brighton, UK: The Harvester Press, 1982), 3-45, 22.
- 14 E. A. J. Honigsmann, *The Stability of Shakespeare's Text* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd., 1965), 5.
- 15 W.W. Greg, "The Rationale of Copy-Text", *Studies in Bibliography* 3 (1950-51): 19-36.
- 16 Fredson T. Bowers, *Bibliography and Textual Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964).
- 17 G. Thomas Tanselle, "The Editorial Problem of Final Authorial Intention." *Studies in Bibliography* 29 (1976): 167-211. <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/bsuva/sb/toc/sib29toc.htm>
- 18 A good explanation of his editorial theories can be found in: D. F. McKenzie, "The Book as an Expressive Form" in David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, eds. *The Book History Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 27, and in Paul Werstine, "Editing Shakespeare and Editing without Shakespeare: Wilson, McKerrow, Greg, Bowers, Tanselle, and Copy-Text Editing", *Text* 13 (2000): 27-53.
- 19 Peter McDonald and Michael F. Suarez, S.J., eds. *Making Meaning. "Printers of the Mind" and Other Essays by D. F. McKenzie* (USA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 8-9. They quote McKenzie from his *Bibliography and Sociology of the Text* (1999), 9.
- 20 Jerome J. McGann, "The Socialization of Texts". In *The Textual Condition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 69-87. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691217758>
- 21 D. F. McKenzie, "Foreword" and "The Sociology of a Text: Oral Culture, Literacy, and Print in Early New Zealand". In *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1-6, and 77-128.
- 22 Philip Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972; repr.1985), 340.
- 23 G. E. Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, Bentley, G. E. *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage. Dramatic Companies and Players*, 7 vols. (1941-68), II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), annex 690, 69.
- 24 Theatre Royal in Drury Lane was founded in 1663 by Thomas Killigrew under a charter from Charles II. A leading stage of the Restoration, it produced works by writers including John Dryden. After a fire destroyed the original building in 1672, it was rebuilt in 1674, probably to designs by Christopher Wren, and staged plays by

- William Congreve. The theatre thrived from 1710 to 1733 under managers such as Colley Cibber and Robert Wilks, declined under Charles Fleetwood, and was revived in 1747 by David Garrick, whose reforms in acting and production restored its prominence for decades. See <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Drury-Lane-Theatre>
- 25 Gary Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare. A Cultural History from the Restoration to the Present* (London: Vintage, 1991), 12.
- 26 Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation and Authorship, 1660-1769* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 5.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 D. Nichol Smith, *Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare* (1903; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), xii.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 David Wheeler, "Eighteenth-Century Adaptations of Shakespeare and the Example of John Dennis." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (1985): 438-449. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2870307>.
- 31 Tiffany Stern, *Making Shakespeare: From Stage to Page* (London: Routledge, 2004), 49.
- 32 Andrew Gurr, "Maximal and Minimal Texts: Shakespeare v. the Globe." *Shakespeare Survey*, edited by Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 68-87, 70.
- 33 Jenny Davidson, "Shakespeare Adaptation", in *Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century*, edited by Fiona Ritchie and Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 185-203, 186.
- 34 David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 6.
- 35 Ibid., 20.
- 36 Davidson, "Shakespeare Adaptation", 192-193.
- 37 Dobson, *The Making*, 5.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Johnson founded Edial Hall School in 1735 near Lichfield, where he taught Latin and Greek to a small group of pupils, including Garrick. Although initially supported by funds from his wife, the school enrolled only between three and seven students and remained open for little more than a year before closing due to financial difficulties.
- 40 Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare*, 119.
- 41 Short comic scene or farce, often adapted from existing plays or created by actors, performed in England during the Civil Wars and Commonwealth (1642-60). With theatres closed under Puritan rule, performers used drolls to bypass restrictions, staging them in informal venues such as inns and fairs on improvised stages. See <https://www.britannica.com/art/droll>
- 42 *The Fairy Queen: An Opera* (London, 1692), n.p. cited in Davidson, 194.
- 43 Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare*, 132.
- 44 George Winchester Stone, Jr. "A Midsummer Night's Dream in the Hands of Garrick and Colman." *PMLA* 54, no. 2 (1939): 467-486, 471.
- 45 Pierre Degott, "Variations on a Reflexive Theme: The Musical Adaptations of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1692-1763)." *Études anglaises* 67, no. 4 (2014): 424-440, 425-26.
- 46 Ibid., 426.
- 47 Kathleen McLuskie, "Afterword: Unending Revels: Visual Pleasure and Compulsory Shakespeare", in *A Concise Companion to Shakespeare on Screen*, edited by Diana E. Henderson (Blackwell, 2006), 238-249, 239-40.
- 48 Samuel Johnson, *Criticism*, edited by Charles Kaplan (Chandler, 1963), 251.
- 49 Samuel Johnson. *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, edited by E. L. McAdam et al., 18 vols. (Yale University Press, 1958-2005), 7:160.
- 50 For a detailed textual history of the play, see: Gary Taylor with John Jowett, "A Midsummer Night's Dream", *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion*, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, with John Jowett and William Montgomery (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 279-287.
- 51 Harold F. Brooks, ed. 'Introduction.' *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare. The Arden Third Series (Singapore: Thomson Learning, 2003), xxi.
- 52 Walter Raleigh, ed. *Johnson on Shakespeare. Essays and Notes Selected and Set Forth With an Introduction by W. Raleigh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965. 1st pub. 1908), 5.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Raleigh, ed. *Johnson, Proposals*, 6.

- 55 Richard F. Kennedy, "Johnson's Shakespeare of 1765: A Comparison of the Two Editions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*", in *Reading Readings: Essays on Shakespeare Editing in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Joanna Gondris (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, and London: Associated University Presses, 1998), 323-329, 323.
- 56 David Nichol Smith, *Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 48.
- 57 Neither Garrick's adaptation nor Johnson's edition includes verse numbers. Therefore, I have provided the conventional line references of the comedy in parentheses, along with the corresponding page numbers for each text in the notes. In Johnson these lines are located in the fourth scene whereas in Garrick we find them in the original second scene of the first act, 14.
- 58 Samuel Johnson, ed. "A Midsummer Night's Dream", in *The Plays of William Shakespeare, with the Corrections and Illustrations of Various Commentators; to Which Are Added Notes by Samuel Johnson*. Vol. 1 of 8 (London: Printed for J. and R. Tonson et al., 1765), note 7, 102.
- 59 Gary Taylor, "General Introduction", in *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion*, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, with John Jowett and William Montgomery (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1-68, 55. For these ideas, Taylor draws on Arthur Sherbo's article: "Samuel Johnson, Editor of Shakespeare", *Illinois Studies in Language and Literature* 42 (1956).
- 60 Johnson, "A Midsummer", note 6, 132.
- 61 Johnson, "A Midsummer", 132.
- 62 Ibid., 88.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 David Garrick, *A Midsummer Night's Dream, Written by William Shakespeare: With Alterations and Additions, and Several New Songs. As It Is Performed at the Theatre-Royal in Drury Lane*. London, 1763, 7.
- 66 Garrick, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 6.
- 67 *The Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) defines "air" as a "connected succession of musical sounds; expressive rhythmical sequence of musical tones; song-like music, melody" (n.18.A.IV).
- 68 Garrick, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 8.
- 69 *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edition, vol. XX (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1989), I.1.A., 755.
- 70 Garrick, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 11.
- 71 Johnson, "A Midsummer Night's Dream", note 3, 99.
- 72 Garrick, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 17.
- 73 Ibid., 30.
- 74 Johnson, "A Midsummer Night's Dream", 104.
- 75 OED, vol. II, 547. 1.
- 76 Garrick, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 19.
- 77 OED, 18, 2.
- 78 OED, A. n. 3. spec.
- 79 Garrick, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 11.
- 80 Ibid., 12. It is interesting to note that in the Folio version we find a question mark after each of the names of the actors, as Quince is, in a way, calling the roll and each is expected to reply and say that he is present.
- 81 W. W. Greg, *The Shakespeare First Folio. Its Bibliographical and Textual History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 122.
- 82 Garrick, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 8.
- 83 Ibid., 19.
- 84 Ibid., 21.
- 85 Michael Dobson, "Shakespeare on the Page and Stage", in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, eds. Margreta De Grazia and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 241.
- 86 Laurie E. Maguire, *Shakespearean Suspect Texts. The 'Bad' Quartos and their Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 115.

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Paula Baldwin Lind

**Text, Stage, and Page: Garrick, Johnson, and the Editing
of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the
Eighteenth Century**

**Texto, escenario y página: Garrick, Johnson y la edición
de *Sueño de una noche de verano* de Shakespeare en el
siglo XVIII**

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amoxtli@uft.cl

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