

BODLEIAN LIBRARIES SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

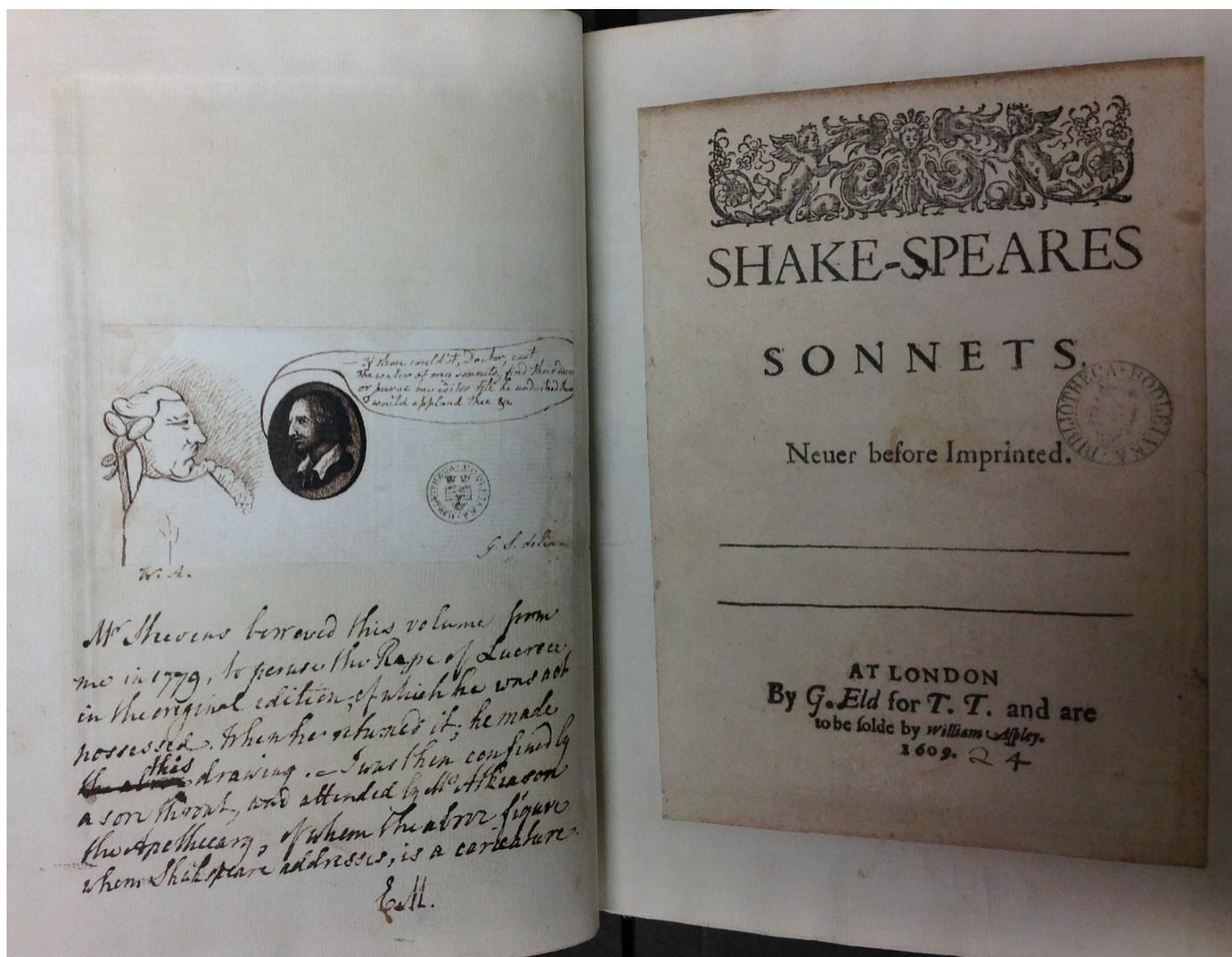
SYMPOSIUM: EDMOND MALONE, 1741-1812

Monday, 30 September 2013, 10:30—4:30

Four speakers examined the life, collection, and scholarly work of Edmond Malone (1757-1812). Presentations and discussions highlighted the significance of Malone and his literary friends and acquaintances in developing questions about Shakespeare's texts and approaches for evaluating the work of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Themes of forgery and authenticity, of scholarly annotation, and of the use of both manuscript and printed material as documents for study of the past, shaped the day's discussion.

The Symposium recognized the outstanding collection of Elizabethan and Caroline plays, poetry and jest-books built by Malone and now in the Bodleian Library, including the unique 1593 edition of William Shakespeare's poem *Venus and Adonis*, and rare early editions of Shakespeare's plays in quarto.

[Books and manuscripts of Edmond Malone at the Bodleian Library](#)



Alan Coates (Bodleian), 'The Malone Collection at the Bodleian Library'

Tiffany Stern (Oxford), 'Malone's Dialogues with the Living and the Dead'

Marcus Walsh (Liverpool), 'Edmond Malone and Enlightenment Text'

Nick Groom (Exeter), 'Malone Unmasking Forgery'

Roundtable discussion, led by James Loxley (Edinburgh)

Alan Coates began the day with a summary of how Malone's collection arrived at the Bodleian Library. The significance of the gift made by Malone's brother Lord Sunderlin and accepted by the library could be seen from three aspects; as the library's repudiation of Thomas Bodley's seventeenth-century proscription of 'baggage books' (plays and other 'trifling' material); as an example to other collectors, demonstrating the library's willingness to maintain the integrity of collections – and one who was notably impressed with the Bodleian's treatment of the Malone collection was Francis Douce (1757-1834), whose later bequest included some of the rarest and most precious manuscripts, prints and printed books now owned by the Bodleian and the Ashmolean; and as an evaluation of early printed poetry and plays as literary evidence which preceded the establishment of the Faculty of English at Oxford by some 70 years.

Tiffany Stern listened to 'Malone's conversations with the living and the dead'. Edmond Malone's marginal notes, for instance as copied from William Oldys, Thomas Percy and George Steevens in his copy of Gerard Langbaine's *Account of the English Dramatic Poets* (1691), are a lens on his life and friendship (and one-upmanship) with those in a literary circle which included Samuel Johnson and James Boswell. His habit of topping the notes of others with triumphant ones of his own, illustrated there, could be seen in his later Shakespeare annotations. The symposium then examined a caricature drawn by Steevens in Malone's copy of the *Sonnets* (1609); a defacement in one sense, but also, being carefully preserved and explained in a note by Malone, evidence of his regard for documents of use to later scholars, as he drew this piece of personal provocation out of the closed circle of his 'frenemies' and made it accessible, deliberately thinks Stern, to posterity – i.e., to Us. His edition of *Double Falshood*, meanwhile, marked up with notes suggesting that Theobald forged the 'Shakespeare' content of the play, and that Massinger was the writer of the root text, showed his hatred of forgery (a hatred that may have encouraged George Steevens to dupe him). But it also revealed how publication has skewed our understanding of Malone's scholarship and scholarship in general – because he did not publish on the perceived forgery of *Double Falshood*, though he did publish on the forgeries of Macklin, Ireland and Chatterton, his fascinating observations have never been pursued: no one has ever looked for Massinger's hand in *Double Falshood*. The Bodleian Library's preservation of the scraps of Malone's notes, which arrived later than the main part of the book collection, continued this archaeological approach to literary documents, one which acknowledged that any disregarded paper might later become recognized as carrying significant information – and that one particular piece on the dating of Shakespeare's plays might either solve a historical conundrum or show that Malone (and we) have been taken in by a forgery.

Marcus Walsh examined Malone's practices as an editor and the great significance of documentary evidence which he assembled in support of his studies of Shakespeare's works. Breaking with a tradition which revelled in a brief but evocative narrative, as in Nicholas Rowe's biography of Shakespeare, Malone sought out documentary evidence for Shakespeare's life and working environment, and insisted on the weight of this evidence in contrast to a 'good story'. Malone – controversially for some later scholars – based his work with early editions on a belief that the original text was there to be uncovered through analysis which could penetrate the errors of the printing house; that the early editions were evidence to be treasured, instead of faulty records in lead and paper that might obscure sympathy with the poet's genius.

Nick Groom spoke about Malone's role in unmasking forgeries, notably on two major forgery incidents, the 'Rowley' poems of Thomas Chatterton and the 'Shakespeare documents' forged by William Henry Ireland. The way Malone assembled a case in each of these controversies, true to his legal training, rebutted every layer of supposed 'evidence' and the nature of the unmasking of handwriting, style and substance, draws our attention to the layers of understanding through which he read the works of Shakespeare and other authors. The details of his actions in each case also showed Malone variously using public denunciation, or private persuasion, as he deemed suitable to the personal reputations and sensitivities at stake; a reminder of the social milieu of literary studies in his time, and Malone's own dependence on connections with other scholars, collectors, and dilettanti.

Led by **James Loxley**, the roundtable discussion brought two themes of the day into clearer focus:

the place of the philological/historical researches of Malone and others, in relation to the field of literary criticism. Speakers and the roundtable audience were inclined to see Malone's life and work as offering rich material demonstrating the opposition or the creative tension between impulses to forgery and the search for authenticity, between intuition and evidence, and between the hunt for historical documents and the collecting of 'relics'.

the extent to which Malone's influence within his literary circle has yet to be appreciated. His large influence on James Boswell the elder, the father of Malone's literary executor, in writing the life of Johnson, and his fundamental role in the placing of the authentic text at the centre of Shakespearean studies, led to the comment that he was 'the man who made Shakespeare -- and Johnson'!