

THE
EDITORIAL PROBLEM
IN SHAKESPEARE

A SURVEY OF
THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE TEXT

BY

W. W. GREG

HONORARY FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

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The editorial implications of this history are curious and complicated. F is of course the generally authoritative text. Where however it is dependent on Q3 it becomes derivative, and for these passages Q1 is the ultimate authority, except for the few notes added by the book-keeper. Elsewhere, whenever F differs from Q6 and there is no reason to suspect an error of the corrector or compositor, it must be taken to reproduce the manuscript and preserve the words of the author.¹ Readings in which F agrees with Q6 against Q1, unless the latter is obviously corrupt, are to be supposed due to imperfect correction of the copy, and the reading of Q1 should be restored. Where F agrees with both quartos its authority is less than where it differs; for we know that it took over a number of errors peculiar to Q6, and there is therefore every reason to suppose that it also took over errors that Q6 had inherited from Q1. It follows that readings in which F has the support of the earlier texts, instead of being the best authenticated, are just the most vulnerable to criticism and open to emendation.

KING LEAR

We have in *King Lear* another play of which the quarto and folio texts differ widely though not so widely as the 'bad' and 'good' quartos of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*. The difference rather resembles what we found in *Richard III*, but it is appreciably greater. Moreover in the case of *Lear* editors agree in regarding the folio as the better text and as presumably representing the prompt copy. It is in their explanation of the general inferiority of the quarto that they differ. Revision has of course been the favourite solution.

mention though it can presumably be of no textual significance. The entrance in the Stationers' Register was made by Andrew Wise, and according to the title-page the first quarto was printed for him by Valentine Simmes. But Colonel Frank Isaac has pointed out to me that Simmes printed only a little over half the book, sheets A to G to be exact. After this the type changes (at III. vii. 54) and sheets H to M were probably printed by Peter Short in a fount he inherited from Denham and used again in his edition of 1 *Henry IV* the following year. The change of type can be observed even in the very poor facsimile.

¹ A slight reservation is here necessary in view of the fact that either the manuscript itself or F underwent some 'reformation' in the matter of profanity, no doubt in consequence of the Act of 27 May 1606 'to Restrain Abuses of Players'. The reformation extends to the passages dependent on Q3.

The most elaborate investigation is that by Miss Doran,¹ whose work on *Henry VI* I have already had occasion to mention. According to her the quarto was printed from Shakespeare's autograph, a manuscript already confused and illegible from much correction and alteration, and thrown aside as worthless when, as a result of a further thorough revision, the play had taken final shape in the prompt-book. This theory is of course, like all of its kind, open to the initial objection, to which I have more than once alluded, that we have no evidence whatever that such persistent and wholesale revision was anything but exceptional in Elizabethan dramaturgy, and further that it appears particularly unlikely in the work of so fluent a writer as Shakespeare. And when it comes to a detailed examination of the texts, I find myself unable to imagine any competent author, least of all Shakespeare—and moreover Shakespeare, not in his apprentice stage as in *Richard III*, but at the very height of his powers—writing the clumsy and tentative lines we find in the quarto, apparently groping after his expression and even his meaning with the hesitancy of a novice. The quarto is, I am convinced, derivative. Nor can I believe that the folio represents a conceivable revision. That Shakespeare should add or delete or recast or touch up is conceivable; but that he should rewrite a play in order to make a lot of verbal alterations is surely not in character, whereas to suggest that the many trivial and indifferent variants were deliberately inserted as corrections into the manuscript as it stood seems to me merely fantastic.²

What I believe to be the true origin of the quarto was once again suggested by Alexander Schmidt in 1879, the year before he applied the same theory to *Richard III*.³ He declared it to be another reported text, somehow based on

¹ *The Text of 'King Lear'*, Stanford University Publications, Language and Literature (IV. 2), 1931.

² Had structural recasting ever necessitated rewriting a play throughout, I have no doubt that in doing so Shakespeare would both consciously and unconsciously have made all sorts of small alterations in the text, many of which would have seemed to us indifferent and unmotivated. But there is no suggestion of any structural necessity for revision in either *Richard III* or *Lear*.

³ Schmidt believed that all the quartos were reports, and *Lear* and *Richard III* naturally offered a convenient foundation on which to build his case.

actual performance; and if I now make bold to maintain this long-dormant theory, I am this time happy in the agreement of no less an authority than Chambers. Besides frequent and often indifferent variants, we find in the quarto all the usual stigmas of a reported text: redundancy, whether through the actors' introduction of vocatives, expletives, or connective phrases, or through their lapsing into looser and more commonplace phraseology, merging into paraphrase; anticipation, recollection, and assimilation; vulgarization, and mere breakdown through failure of memory. A few examples will illustrate different kinds of degeneration.

The two forms of redundancy unite in a line that is typical of a good many others:

F: I am made of that self metal as my sister . . .

Q: Sir, I am made of the selfsame metal that my sister is . . .

The loosening of the texture is obvious: the vigorous phrase 'that self metal' suggests to the actor's mind the familiar 'selfsame' that comes so glibly from his tongue. The verse itself stamps the folio as correct, and surely original: it seems incredible that the Globe edition (though not the Cambridge) should have preferred the quarto reading. More extensive insertions are to be seen in

F: *Lear*. . . Thou shalt find
That I'll resume the shape which thou dost think
I have cast off for ever [*Q adds: , thou shalt, I warrant thee.*]
Goneril. Do you mark that [*Q adds: , my lord*]?
[*Q adds: , my lord*]?

('I have cast off for ever.—Do you mark that?') is of course one metrical line.) A further point to observe is that these connective and redundant phrases tend to be borrowed or repeated from neighbouring passages, such assimilation being a natural trick of imperfect memory.¹ Thus in the first scene *Lear* twice admonishes *Cordelia* in lines that run in F:

Nothing will come of nothing; speak again

and

How, how, *Cordelia*? Mend your speech a little,

¹ In *Richard III* repetition and parallelism of phrase is a deliberate rhetorical device of composition, and it is therefore less easy to apply this criterion of reporting. But there is nothing similar in the mature writing of *Lear*.

where Q borrows 'How' from the second to prefix unmetrically to the first, and gives the second in the form:

Go to, go to! Mend your speech a little,

using a fretful exclamation that it inserts again and unmetrically later in the scene:

[Go to, go to!] Better thou

Hadst not been born than not t' have pleased me better

(where 'Better thou' properly completes the line that begins 'Hath lost me in your liking').

One form of vulgarization is exaggeration. Gross minds, like immature, seek to impress by overstatement. When *Kent*, jibing at *Oswald*, says 'A tailor made thee', he explains:

a stonecutter or a painter could not have made him so ill, though they had been but two years o'th' trade.

This is sober sense: Shakespeare knows that art is long. But to the actor and to the groundling two years seems an age: so the quarto substitutes 'two hours', which is absurd. Actors' bombast and vociferation have also left their mark on the quarto.

An obvious indication of reporting is failure of memory. Here is a passage in which Q stands condemned by the metre: F reads,

Why brand they us

With base, with baseness, bastardy, base, base?

The verse is correct, but it is not an easy line to memorize exactly, and it is no surprise to find in Q the syncopated form 'With base, base bastardy?' There is no reason why a scribe or compositor should have produced this, nor is it likely that Shakespeare would have originally written this short line in the middle of a perfectly regular speech and then padded it out.¹ Again, failure of memory alone can, it seems to me, account for the following. When in the first

¹ The speech is printed as prose in Q, but apart from this line and one omission the words are substantially correct.

scene Lear at last turns to Cordelia he addresses her in the tender words:

Now, our joy,
Although our last and least! to whose young love
The vines of France and milk of Burgundy
Strive to be interest . . .

In place of this Q only has:

But now, our joy,
Although the last, not least in our dear love . . .

Surely it was the loss of a line and a half that occasioned the reconstruction.¹

But it is largely on the verbal variants that the case for reporting must rest. It is generally admitted that where these are not indifferent the folio usually has the better reading. This of course is what we should expect if the quarto is an actors' text, for when an actor substitutes another word for the author's it will usually be a feebler one, though now and then it may give a smoother or easier reading that will commend it to editors. I believe that with few exceptions the folio preserves the original reading, and that this can often be proved. Let us begin with one or two indifferent readings. Consider this:

Five [Q: Four] days we do allot thee for provision
To shield thee from disasters [Q: diseases] of the world,
And on the sixth [Q: fifth] to turn thy hated back
Upon our kingdom . . .

It is no doubt conceivable that a compositor might print 'diseases' for 'disasters' or *vice versa*, or even that an author might substitute one for the other in revision. But the numbers, indifferent in themselves, are consistently varied, and here neither explanation seems satisfactory. Moreover it is curious how often what at first sight appears to be an indifferent variant in the quarto is condemned by a further examination of the text. Sometimes it is found to be an actor's assimilation. In 'O vassal! miscreant!' where Q has

¹ The corruption was no doubt helped by the familiarity of the phrase 'last not least', which was already established in popular use, as *Euphues* and the *Arcadia* witness. Indeed it seems to have been occasioned by an actor's reminiscence of *Julius Caesar*, III. i. 189, 'Though last, not least in love'.

'recreant', the latter anticipates 'Hear me, recreant!' six lines later, where Q omits the word: in 'Love's not love When it is mingled with regards [Q: respects]', the variant anticipates [Q] 'respects of fortune are his love', nine lines below: whereas in 'Thou [Q: thy blood] hotly lusts to use her in that kind', the unmetrical reading of Q seems to contain a recollection of 'hold thy bloody hand' just before. Sometimes there is a subtle difference of meaning that escaped the actor or reporter. When Goneril says, 'This milky gentleness and course of yours Though I condemn not [Q: dislike not]', she makes a concession to decency in saying that she does not condemn the gentlemanly behaviour of her husband—it would never occur to her to pretend to like it. Sometimes the sense or at least the implication of the words has been mistaken. Cordelia's parting injunction to her sisters, 'Love [Q: Use] well our father', means simply: Make good your professions of love—she had yet no ground for supposing they would use the old man ill. But to an actor familiar with the sequel 'Use' would come naturally enough. So Oswald, egged on by Regan to murder Gloucester, says:

Would I could meet him, madam; I should show
What party I do follow.

Q has 'What lady I do follow', and since their talk has been of the rivalry between the sisters, the words would seem appropriate enough to an actor: but it is of course the 'British party' that the author means.

I hope I have said enough to show that the features of the first quarto of *King Lear* are such as to make reporting a reasonable hypothesis. They are generally similar to what we found in *Richard III*: there are however also some marked differences. In that play the folio text is about 200 lines longer than the quarto: here the quarto text is longer than the folio by a like amount. This seems due to the two versions having been differently cut for acting: I may mention that at one point (III. i. 29–30), where Q and F present alternative texts, the cutting appears to have overlapped, so that a portion of the text is irretrievably lost. Perhaps that does not matter much in an inferior scene of a

very long play.¹ Another difference is that the repetitions and borrowings are all, I think, from neighbouring passages; there are no anticipations or recollections of lines from distant parts of the play: in other words they are of a type that might occur in representation and do not involve the supposition that the text was reconstructed from memory.

I mentioned before that there appear to be no mistakes of the ear or serious confusion between speakers in *Richard III*: both are found in *Lear*. Of course, as is now recognized, the mental substitutions of a compositor may sometimes have the appearance of mishearings. We could imagine him printing, as in Q:

No blown ambition doth our arms in sight,

even if his copy correctly read 'incite', as in F. But it is more difficult to believe that it was he who converted 'a dog's obeyed in office' (F) into 'a dog, so bade in office' (Q). The following:

F: Striving to better, oft we mar what's well

Q: Striving to better ought, we mar what's well

may puzzle us till we remember that Shakespeare rimes *oft* and *nought* (just as he rimes *after* and *daughter* in the same scene). These are no freakish misprints, it would seem, for in both passages the punctuation has been accommodated to the false sense—though this might indeed have been done by a press reader. Once mishearing is admitted it may be seen in a number of other instances, of which the most amusing is the conversion of the 'mopping and mowing' of chambermaids into the devils 'Mobing and Mohing' in a passage omitted by the folio.

Speeches assigned to the wrong speaker are not very numerous, still there seem to be three or four clear instances. They are not mere slips, for the words have sometimes been altered to fit the speaker; and this has led to some dispute as to which assignment is correct. There can I think be no doubt about the following. When smouldering jealousies suddenly flame up in the last scene, Regan urges Edmund to use her army

¹ It may of course have happened at other points where it cannot now be detected.

to make good his claim to her hand, with the words (in F):

Let the drum strike, and prove my title thine

(i.e. do thou prove); whereas in Q it is Edmund himself who says:

Let the drum strike and prove my title good

which is nonsense—a drum can prove nothing but its capacity for noise.

Now, errors of the ear and misassignment of speeches are blunders that may easily be made by a reporter attending a performance; they are less likely to arise if a body of actors endeavour to reconstruct from memory a play they have been in the habit of performing. We are already being driven to look for an origin of the *Lear* quarto different from that suggested for *Richard III*. A last piece of evidence should clinch the matter.

The most obvious characteristics of the quarto of *Lear* are its disregard of metre and its inadequate and often erroneous punctuation. Chambers remarks that 'mislineation is a constant feature of Q. . . . Occasionally it is altogether unmetrical. Prose is printed as verse. Still more often is verse printed as prose . . . Q has practically no punctuation except commas.' Of course misrepresentation of metre may arise from a variety of causes; and we know that manuscripts were often inadequately punctuated. But what we find in the *Lear* quarto is altogether abnormal for a printed book. We could well imagine that the printer had before him copy that was altogether without punctuation or metrical division, and that the different treatment it received in the several parts of the play was due to the different degree of skill shown by several compositors. Such copy would naturally result from a shorthand report, and I do not know what else would produce it.¹

I know all the objections to the theory of shorthand reporting, for I have often argued them myself. The text is too long to have been acted in the time allowed on the Elizabethan stage; it would have been impossible to make a steno-

¹ This contention is further developed in an article on "'King Lear"—Mislineation and Stenography' in *The Library*, 1936, xvii. 172. Of course punctuation and division may have been introduced by the reporter in making his longhand transcript, but that would not make them less conjectural.

graphic report unobserved in an Elizabethan theatre; no available system would have been capable of producing so accurate a report. But there are possible answers. The evidence does not force us to believe that all performances were restricted to anything like two hours: we know that some given at court lasted much longer. Moreover at such a special performance a reporter, if he got in, would be more difficult to detect and also more difficult to remove—and we know that *Lear* was acted at court.¹ As regards the system of shorthand used I must differ from Dr. J. Q. Adams, who has argued in detail in favour of Bright's Charactery.² That this could have furnished a report such as we find in the quarto of *Lear* I cannot believe: but since 1602 there had been available Willis's Stenography, an admittedly superior system, which Heywood asserted to have been actually used for the pirating of plays. I must leave it at that, for in this instance I cannot but conclude that some kind of shorthand was employed, however little I like the conclusion.³

That the folio represents a playhouse manuscript is fairly evident and indeed is hardly disputed. As I said, it has been cut for performance, and the cuts are on the whole judicious: 'I could better believe that Shakespeare cut it than wrote it', Granville-Barker says of an omitted scene (iv. iii).⁴ There is a complete division into acts and scenes, and I may mention incidentally that this seems to belong to the original composition, and moreover that the play was apparently written for performance on a stage that lacked the usual alcove at the back and presumably the balcony above it.⁵ It is however doubtful whether the folio text was actually printed from the manuscript. Opinions differ, but in mine there can be no

¹ The representation given at court (on 26 Dec. 1606) was probably not the first. But I believe the play to have been originally written for a private performance (see below) and this may have afforded equally good opportunities.

² *Modern Philology*, 1933, xxxi. 135. See a reply by M. Doran in the same, 1935, xxxiii. 139.

³ Shorthand would of course seem to imply piracy: at the same time the entrance in the Stationers' Register is perfectly normal, and was made under the hand of Sir George Buc, though that would not necessarily imply authorized publication.

⁴ *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, First Series, 1927, p. 228.

⁵ *R.E.S.*, 1940, xvi. 300. Crompton Rhodes observed this, but drew the conclusion that the play had been 'revised for a special revival' (*Shakespeare's First Folio*, p. 109).

doubt that it was actually set up from a copy of the first quarto, the so-called 'Pied Bull' quarto of 1608, which had been elaborately corrected, cut, and supplemented, by comparison with the manuscript. It was P. A. Daniel who first put forward this view,¹ and although with respect to individual passages his argument was not always sound, I think that sufficient can be established to supplement what Chambers calls 'a continuance of errors and a general orthographic resemblance' in the construction of a convincing case.²

I must mention to begin with that copies of the first quarto differ among themselves in a remarkable number of passages—about 150 readings are involved—owing to the type having been corrected as the sheets went through the press.³ Now, we know, from the nature of the alterations themselves, that some are genuine corrections restoring the reading of the copy, while others are mere guesses at points where neither the compositor nor the corrector could decipher the writing. All twelve extant copies show a mixture of corrected and uncorrected sheets; and if the folio was printed from a copy of the quarto, this too no doubt contained samples of both. If therefore we find the folio either reproducing an original error of the quarto compositor for which the corrector substituted the true reading, or else reproducing an alteration by the corrector that is no true reading but an arbitrary guess, it will follow that the folio was printed with correction from a copy of the quarto and not directly from the manuscript. The presence of both can I believe be demonstrated.⁴

¹ Introduction to the Praetorius facsimile of Q1, 1885.

² That there is some direct connexion between Q1 and F seems certain, and the possibility considered (p. 86, note 2) in *Richard III*, that the compositor of F merely referred to Q1 when in difficulty, appears to be excluded by frequent coincidence in spelling and punctuation and by distinct bibliographical links, features not found in the earlier play.

³ See *The Variants in the First Quarto of 'King Lear'*, Bibliographical Society, 1940. For a somewhat more detailed outline of the textual theory suggested in this lecture, see a paper on 'The Function of Bibliography in Literary Criticism illustrated in a Study of the Text of "King Lear"' in *Neophilologus*, 1933, xviii. 241.

⁴ Of course examples of the two must not occur in passages belonging to the same sheet (or more precisely to the same forme) of the quarto, or their evidence will be mutually destructive.

There is a speech of Edmund's (in sheet K) the opening lines of which should run as follows:

Sir, I thought it fit
To send the old and miserable king
To some retention and appointed guard,
Whose age had charms in it, whose title more,
To pluck the common bosom on his side . . .

Here the half-line 'and appointed guard', which is necessary to the verse and I think unquestionably genuine, was supplied by the press reader in the corrected state of the quarto text. The compositor had omitted it, and he moreover set up the previous line and a half as a single line of type. But the half-line is again missing in the folio, and the preceding line and a half appear in the same impossible form. The natural inference is that in this passage the folio compositor had before him an uncorrected copy of the quarto sheet, in which the error had been overlooked when it was collated with the prompt-book, either through carelessness or because the manuscript was defective at this point.

On the other hand, Goneril (in sheet D) addresses her milder husband Albany in words that run in the folio (after correction of one trifling misprint):

No no, my lord,
This milky gentleness and course of yours
Though I condemn not, yet, under pardon,
You are much more at task for want of wisdom
Than praised for harmful mildness.

The words 'at task' are open to suspicion. There is no record of such a phrase elsewhere, and it seems hardly capable of bearing the required meaning (viz. taken to task, blamed): moreover a participle seems required to balance 'praised'. This the corrected state of the quarto sheet supplies in the word 'attaskt'. But this cannot have been the reading of the copy, for the compositor originally set up the impossible word 'alapt', and behind 'alapt' there must, on well-known graphic principles, have been the form 'ataxt'.¹ Now,

¹ The confusion of *t* and *l* is particularly common in the quarto, while *x* and *p* are often indistinguishable in Elizabethan secretary hands.

ataxed, i.e. taxed, is at least as fitting in the context as *atasked*, i.e. taken to task; though in fact neither is elsewhere recorded. It follows that 'attaskt' is a ghost word invented by the press reader, and when the folio editor or compositor further altered it to 'at task', he proved that he had before him a corrected sheet of the quarto, for the word existed nowhere else.

The following is an instance of typically erroneous punctuation in the quarto surviving in the folio. Immediately after his rejection of Cordelia, Lear exclaims:

Call France! Who stirs?
Call Burgundy! Cornwall and Albany,
With my two daughters' dowers digest the third . . .

This the folio renders unintelligible by following exactly the pointing of the quarto:

call France, who stirs?
Call Burgundy, Cornwall, and Albany, . . .

I should like to add that there is some difference in the character of the stage directions as they appear in the two texts. The quarto, as we should expect from a report, tends to describe action as seen by the spectator: 'She takes a sword and runs at him behind' is an instance. The folio, on the contrary, often preserves the terse orders of the prompter: 'Kills him' is all it offers in the same passage. It is therefore significant when we find the descriptive direction, 'Enter Lear with Cordelia in his arms', agreeing *literatim* in the two texts.¹

Naturally the folio contains printers' errors that can be removed by comparison with the quarto. Furthermore, in the prompt-book itself a difficult or obsolescent word appears now and again to have been altered on the occasion of some later production: or possibly these substitutions should be ascribed to 'the sophisticating editor' of the folio, as Chambers calls him, whose hand can be traced in many plays. Two examples occur close together in a speech of Gloucester's in III. vii:

In his anointed flesh stick boarish fangs

¹ See appendix (p. 172).

where the quarto's 'rash boarish fangs' is I think certainly original, and

If wolves had at thy gate howled that stern time,

where the same may be said of the quarto's 'dern time'. I suspect another instance where according to the folio Flibbertigibbet 'squints the eye and makes the hare-lip'. In place of 'squints' the corrected state of the quarto has 'squemes', which may be a misprint for 'squenies', a dialect form of the word, which as 'squiny' occurs elsewhere in the play. But the compositor originally set up 'queues', which may have been an error for 'squenies', yet another dialectal form, conveniently preserved for us in two pamphlets of 1608 and 1609 by Robert Armin. Armin had the best possible opportunity of picking up the word from this very passage, for he himself played the Fool in *Lear* and was on the stage when it was spoken.

The general conclusion therefore is that the quarto is a reported text, badly printed and arbitrarily corrected, of small textual value. The folio is based on the prompt-book,¹ and is of high authority; however, it was not printed from the manuscript, but from a copy of the quarto that had been brought into general though not complete conformity with it. The consequences for an editor are clear if rather paradoxical, and are much the same as in *Richard III*; namely that where our two authorities differ we have better warrant for the text than where they agree, since in the former case the reading of the folio must (accidents apart) be that of the prompt-book, whereas in the latter the folio may have taken over an error from the quarto. Acceptance of this conclusion would affect the current text in two ways. In the first place there would be a general restoration of folio readings that

¹ Clearly I think the prompt-book and not the author's manuscript, to judge from the directions. There is slight inconsistency in the use of 'Edmund' and 'Bastard' in directions and speech headings, but this is more likely due to the influence of Q. Possibly the manuscript had 'Edmund' throughout. (Note that at the end of I. ii where there is an addition in F we find *Edm.* replacing *Bast.* as prefix.) Kent's confused speech at the end of II. ii (170-81) looks indeed like an author's unresolved tangle, but except for three errors it is found verbatim in Q. There appears to have been some reduction in the number of actors needed for minor parts in F (Doran, pp. 79-80).

editors have displaced in favour of the quarto. The Globe text of *Lear* must contain some four hundred quarto readings (apart from passages preserved only in the quarto) of which perhaps three hundred would go. This would involve some loss of smoothness, but I believe a surprising accession of vigour. In the second place, by depriving the agreement of quarto and folio of its supposed authority, it would open the way to much greater freedom of emendation than would else be proper. And what use editors would make of that is perhaps, like the ways of providence, better only guessing.