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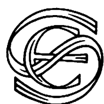

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The Two Versions of *King Lear*

A Review Article

Shakespeare wrote two versions of *King Lear.* The quarto and folio printings, textually divergent, are witnesses to the fact. The notion is not new. Eighteenth-century editors toyed with it, to Dr Johnson it was a natural supposition. In this century, its foremost proponents have been Madeleine Doran and Ernest Honigmann. What is curious is not that from the textual differences between the first transmitted texts the idea of the revising author in *King Lear* should have suggested itself, but rather that, over two centuries, the notion should so consistently have been held at bay as an unorthodoxy. But this precisely has been the case. Thus it is that those who since 1976 have worked at reviving the old minority belief by increasingly urging its editorial and critical consequences, have seen their task not merely as one of clarifying facts, but of establishing a new orthodoxy to oppose — before safely and uncontentiously replacing — the old one.

For a decade now, the issues have been intensely debated. Not the identity or double identity of Shakespeare's *King Lear* alone — though in itself a subject to engage the strengths of the worthiest — has been recognised to be at stake. In the field that bibliography-centered textual criticism in the 20th century has so searchingly investigated, mapped out and contained within the fencings of a comprehensive methodology of codification and procedure, the resurgent claim that Quarto and Folio *Lear* differ by reason of authorial revision has thrown open anew central questions concerning the analysis of the Shakespearean textual documents and the editing of their texts. To the extent that the debate has touched upon fundamental notions about the relationship of bibliography to textual criticism, about the relevance of criticism to editing, or

about the composition and early transmission of Shakespeare's text, or texts, it goes to the roots of prevailing concepts of Anglo-American textual scholarship.

*

The twilight of refinement in conventionally bibliography-oriented thinking about the textual problems of *King Lear* descends in P. W. K. Stone, *The Textual History of* King Lear (London: Scholar Press, 1980). Occasional demurrers notwithstanding, it moves wholly within the system of 20th century textual studies of Shakespeare as shaped by W. W. Greg, Alice Walker, Fredson Bowers, Charlton Hinman and (for *Lear* in particular) Ian Duthie. Taking its cue from their consensus that the plays featuring so-called collateral substantive texts in Quarto and Folio have as yet neither as a group, nor individually, yielded all their secrets, it is the kind of investigation and attempt at reassessment within prescribed and accepted coordinates that was sooner or later bound to be undertaken.

All the essential categories — some strictly bibliographical, though many bibliographical only by association — are invoked that one is accustomed to encounter and see combined to explain textual peculiarities: assumed palaeographic error, lost manuscript(s) and copy, hypothetical transcripts, report versus transcriptional linking of lost or extant documents, faithful or bungling workmanship, correcting, revising or proof-reading agents, manuscript versus printed (and 1st-versus 2nd-quarto) copy, analysis of the typesetting and printing procedures. Applied to the problem of *King Lear*, the categories of argument so classifiable engender hypothesis and explanation about the derivation and authority of Q1, the derivation of the Folio text, the nature and authority of the Folio additions, the manuscript source of the Folio corrections, the textual history of F, manuscript versus Quarto copy for F, the role of Q2 in relation to F, and the printing process itself of F.

A fresh theory of the history of the text of *King Lear* emerges that differs significantly from the textual hypotheses of earlier investigators. Notably, within this theory, the estimation of potential authority in Q1 is raised, and Q2 becomes identified as the printed substratum in the printer's copy for F, whose mixed nature and treatment at the hands of the Folio compositors are matters brought into focus through a differentiation of observed detail that on all accounts will merit close editorial consideration in future. The theory culminates in a new and intricate stemmatic model for a convergence of the Q1 and F texts that discounts the notion of an independent manuscript behind F and assumes instead that the (part-)manuscript from which F was (in part) printed derives ultimately from a transcript of Q1, while additionally incorporating revisional material dateable to after Shakespeare's death, and thus composed by another hand. Philip Massinger, it is suggested, was the reviser responsible for *King Lear* in the Folio.

The theory's stemmatic capping, and the entire argument's intricacy of refinement, result, it would seem, from a desire to keep inviolate two underlying and interconnected axioms: the first, that there was ever only one Shakespearean text of *King Lear* — in this case firmly believed to stand behind Q1 — and the second, that Shakespeare was not the reviser of *Lear*.

*

The one-text axiom is the pivotal orthodoxy in Stone's theory of the text of *King Lear*, as in all main-line studies of Shakespeare's texts and editions of his plays. In current thinking about Shakespeare's text, it holds a homologous position to the concept of 'ideal text' in the rationale for copy-text editing — in fact, as is well known, the one-text axiom and

the editorial goal of an 'ideal text' reinforce each other in the practice of Shakespearean editing — or, similarly, to the rational construct of an 'ideal copy' in analytical bibliography. Outside observers — such as theorists, for instance, in modern German textual scholarship — tend to recognise more readily than do the practitioners within the field the legacy, in these notions, of classical and medieval textual criticism. Bibliography-centered textual criticism, although it is textual criticism re-conceptualised for the conditions of transmission since the advent of the printed book, was never, in the transmissional situations prevailing for 16th and 17th century texts, urgently pressed to reassess the concept of the textual 'archetype'. After all, a bibliographical methodology deals by definition with the transmission rather than with the composition of texts, and its tendency reductively to rationalise the complications of composition should therefore not seem surprising. Notably in W. W. Greg's *Rationale of Copy-Text*, for all its important reassessments and innovations, the archetype — quintessential point of rational reduction in textual scholarship — is implicitly reaffirmed. Hence, the one-text axiom is its virulent vestige in Shakespearean textual studies and editing.

Shakespearean textual studies, in their turn, have set the main paradigm for the whole of current Anglo-American textual scholarship. With a wider application of their rules and procedures, it is true, the number of cases have increased where, on the basis of preserved textual evidence, taking cognisance of two- or multi-version situations of composition and transmission has become unavoidable. But by force of the strong regulating power of the paradigm they have tended to be seen as fringe situations, to be dealt with in exceptional ways. Such 'exceptional ways' have been felt (often with unease) to entail reducing the application of bibliographical methodology and resorting to critical argument in textual criticism.

The unease, where felt, derives from the circumstance that bibliography-centered textual criticism has established for itself a hierarchy of permissible reasoning: the critical argument for compositional — i. e., corrective and, mainly, revisional — causes of textual variation is allowed full range and force only when the bibliographical demonstration or inference of transmissional corruption weakens or fails. Yet the opposite approach is imaginable and is indeed practised outside Anglo-American textual criticism: compositional causes for textual variation are assumed, and only when their critical defence fails is transmissional corruption conceded. The empiric truth that all transmission corrupts, elevated to an axiom of bibliography-oriented textual criticism, coexists easily with the assumption of one ideal text behind all (implicitly transmissional) variation. By contrast, if one holds the critical axiom that any two or more texts of a work are different because they are meant to be different, the one-text situation will be recognised and conceded only when the critical premise is invalidated by its argued inapplicability to a case in hand. From the vantage-point of critically oriented textual criticism, the usual Shakespearean situation — only one substantive printed text, and no manuscripts — is a fringe situation, and the case of *King Lear* would appear a normal case.

*

What, then, is to be argued for *King Lear*? Is the onus of proof really on those who assume that two versions of the play have reached print, and that the textual divergence of Quarto and Folio is essentially due to authorial revision? Or is it — or shouldn't it be — rather on those who hold the vagaries of transmission and the exigencies of printing to be sufficient grounds for explaining the textual differences of the play's first and second

editions? In reality, of course, the alternative may appear by no means so clear-cut. Two versions may be conceded, and yet the author may be denied a hand in the second. Or, conversely, it may be held necessary to ascribe all manifest variation to transmissional causes, since authorial revision, though a possibility, is deemed undemonstrable. The particular strength, therefore, of the re-opened case for two essentially authorial versions of *King Lear* lies in its two-pronged attack. In the individual essays by Michael Warren ("Quarto and Folio *King Lear* and the Interpretation of Albany and Edgar", in: *Shakespeare, Pattern of Excelling Nature*, eds. David Bevington and Jay L. Halio, Newark/Delaware 1978, pp. 95—107) and Gary Taylor ("The War in *King Lear*", *Shakespeare Survey*, 33 (1980), 27—34), and in the books by Steven Urkowitz (*Shakespeare's Revision of* King Lear. Princeton 1980), Peter W. M. Blayney (*The Texts of* King Lear *and their Origins*. Vol. I: *Nicholas Okes and the First Quarto*. Cambridge 1982) and the collection of essays edited by Gary Taylor and Michael Warren (*The Division of the Kingdoms*. Oxford 1983), the argument is both critical and fundamentally bibliographic.

Nicholas Okes and the First Quarto is the first part of Peter W. M. Blayney's advertised two-volume investigation of *The Texts of* King Lear *and their Origins*. It realises uniquely what textual bibliographers ideally demand of analytical bibliography: for the sake of one book and its text, it explores and analyses the entire activities of its printer and, beyond, of the printinghouse to which that printer, Nicholas Okes, succeeded shortly before taking Q1 *Lear* in hand. The published volume, even by itself, is an achievement comparable to that of Charlton Hinman's *The Printing and Proof-Reading of the First Folio of Shakespeare* (1963). The study penetrates to first bibliographic causes underlying the printing of Q1 with a systematic comprehensiveness of a wholly different order from that of Stone's conventionalised bibliographic orientation. Its theoretical and methodological foundations are laid out in a brief yet incisive Introduction which, by way of a radical critique of central precepts enunciated and patterns of argument prestructured by W. W. Greg, endeavours to disentangle and to redefine the relationship of bibliography (the analysis of books as physical objects), textual criticism (the study of the history of texts) and textual meta-criticism (editing). The published volume is an exhaustive exercise only in the first of these areas. The application, from its bibliographical foundations, of textual criticism and meta-criticism to the problem of the texts of *King Lear* is promised for the second volume. When it appears, it will, for potential impact on Shakespearean textual scholarship, enter into contest with those recent *Lear* studies whose original point of departure has been not bibliographic, but critical.

*

An altered understanding of the implications and significance of the points of difference between the surviving primary texts for *King Lear* does not assume the magnitude of a scientific revolution. Nevertheless, a fresh paradigm has been proposed; and it is in accordance with recognised patterns for new departures in scholarship that, from an unease with a current situation (in this case, the state of Shakespeare's text in editions) grown virulent, the challenge should have come from outside the pale of orthodoxy and received practice in Shakespearean textual criticism and editing.

Increased interest in the theatrical nature of Shakespeare's plays has characterised much important work in Shakespeare criticism over the past couple of decades or so. It is this interest in particular that has engendered a renewed concern for Shakespeare's text under perspectives that differ from those of traditional book learning in the discipline. Whether

the individual critic has been conscious of the fact or not, the received format of Shakespeare editions does not, on the whole, support explorations of the plays' theatricality. This is not to say that discernment and understanding of their specifically dramatic structures and varieties of theatrical effect have not been greatly advanced. Yet they have often been gained against the grain of the available texts.

By standard precepts of textual criticism and procedures of editing, play texts get treated much like other species of text: as a rule, dramatic texts are editorially conceived of and presented as book texts. This, arguably, is sound enough procedure where no recourse can be had to theatrical scripts (let alone sound recordings), where books, therefore, are the sole extant documents of textual transmission, and where the texts edited, moreover, require the bookishness of annotation. Nevertheless, it doubly vitiates against the theatrical potential of the transmitted texts if, on the one hand, the dominant concern in editing is for the written word even to such an extent that (as has been the case in the history of editing *King Lear*) the cumulation of all text felt to have the true Shakespearean ring is considered to result in the best (since most comprehensive) edition; and if, on the other hand, the editorial attention admittedly given to theatrical and stage matters is mainly designed to render the edited texts the more determinate as reading texts. It is with readers far more than with theatre people in mind that the conscientious editor customarily marks act and scene divisions, localities, dramatic situations, or even entrances and exits, gestures, props and general stage business. Editorial notation to convey these matters is lavished on the seams, so to speak, of the transmitted body of the texts. Not only does it overdetermine the texts as reading texts in ways alien to Elizabethan practices of performance; it also stresses and particularises local effect and is seldom, if ever, accompanied by a searching regard for the larger dramatic and theatrical sweep.

The critic in pursuit of his variously defined interests in Shakespeare's art may, at worst, remain oblivious of the editorial conditioning of the play-texts he works with. Even with an awareness in principle of the problems inherent in given precepts and procedures of textual scholarship, he may feel constrained to acquiescing in the cumulated — or: conflated — texts designed for readers that result from them. Yet Steven Urkowitz, in *Shakespeare's Revision of* King Lear, presents the example of a scholar-critic whose urge to secure the critical validity of perceived theatrical structures has induced him to question fundamentally the play's textual basis. The conflation of Quarto and Folio *Lear* practised since the 18th century constitutes for him an extreme case of a play's alienation from its extant textual origins. Consequently, he wholly abandons the standard edited text and works instead directly from the unedited first editions "to examine the theatrical qualities of the Quarto and Folio texts of *King Lear*" (p. 15). The chapters that follow a well-informed and thoughtful critique of the editorial tradition discuss, in turn, textual variants in dramatic contexts (Chapter II), textual variants and players' entrances and exits (Chapter III), interrupted exits (Chapter IV, with a thoroughly convincing demonstration, from the example of the Kent-Gentleman encounter in III. i, of the havoc wrought by editorial conflation), and the role of Albany (Chapter V). The book's over-all concern is with recurrent patterns of variant theatrical realisation, and with variant character conception. In this, it moves on middle ground between isolated verbal variation or localised theatrical effect on the one hand, and possible considerations of comprehensive structuring on the other. (The question of a fundamental reconception of plotting and thematic

design as argued in Gary Taylor's "The War in *King Lear*" is touched upon mainly in the fourth chapter's discussion of the Kent-Gentleman encounter in III. i.)

In approaching the quarto and folio texts foremost as two distinct theatrical versions, Urkowitz initially defuses the issue of the authorial origin of the textual variation and does not proceed from his titular thesis as from a foregone conclusion. This is sensible tactics, since it serves to make the reader aware of the internal consistency and superior quality of the theatrical variants before being confronted with the book's potentially controversial central thesis. When asked in the final chapter to accept the argument for *Shakespeare's* revision of *King Lear* — an argument that nevertheless does not deny the very real possibility of transmissional origin for some proportion of the variation in print — one may feel inclined to adopt it as the most plausible of solutions to a critically well established case. Once William Shakespeare has been made out as the likely script-writer for the theatrical version of *King Lear* represented by the Folio text, that same William Shakespeare effectively becomes the author of the thoroughgoing revisions that patently distinguish Folio from Quarto. Such reasoning in turn lessens the strain of incredulity on the Quarto text. Its origin in authorial foul papers is, in effect, more plausibly argued by Urkowitz, who accepts the Folio revision as Shakespeare's, than by Stone, who contends that the Folio version is of pure company origin.

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The studies by Stone, Blayney and Urkowitz must, individually and together, be regarded as seminal to a radical reassessment of the problem of the texts of *King Lear*. Their common ground is a recognition of two versions of the play behind Quarto and Folio. Their basic assumptions and methods of investigation, it is true, vary considerably and lead to conclusions differing to the point of incompatibility. Yet their very disagreements serve the better to focus the central issues of the *Lear* problem. These are the assumption of two versions — which, superseding contrary hypotheses, appears to be agreed, with the estimation of Q in proximity to authorial papers raised accordingly — and the questions of authority and authorship of the corrective and/or revisional changes that define the Folio text as a distinct version of the play — on which Stone and Urkowitz are indeed diametrically opposed, while Blayney's conclusions as yet remain unpublished. Beyond, further investigations are necessary. These must be bibliographic and critical: bibliographic since bibliography offers the methodology to deal with texts in transmission, and critical since determination of authorship cannot ultimately be other than a task of critical enquiry and judgement.

The Division of the Kingdoms: Shakespeare's Two Versions of King Lear, a collection of original essays edited by Gary Taylor and Michael Warren (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), carries the debate forward from Stone, Urkowitz, and Blayney's published volume. The contributions were commissioned with an awareness of "several outstanding issues pertinent to the hypothesis that [the Quarto and Folio] texts represent independent Shakespearian versions of *King Lear*"; and — pending the conclusion of Blayney's in-depth investigation of the Quarto, but assuming Q's proximity to authorial papers, and hence its basic authenticity as a version — they focus mainly on the Folio. More than an assembly of individual essays, the book is a model of heuristically hermeneutic teamwork.

The Introduction by Stanley Wells and the opening essay by Steven Urkowitz provide a summary exposition of the issues and a critique of the editorial tradition of conflation.

Then follows a group of essays — by Roger Warren, Michael Warren, Gary Taylor (the first of two particularly wide-ranging contributions), Thomas Clayton and Beth Goldring — that are predominantly examples of practical genetic criticism. In a mode similar to that of Steven Urkowitz's earlier monograph, they build on the two-version hypothesis to discuss variants of structure, of character conception (Kent, the evil daughters, or the King himself), or of theatrical situation (the most prominent example discussed is the presence versus absence of the mock trial). To assume two versions permits regarding given readings and their variants as alternatives of comparable, or indeed equal, validity in the respective contexts of Q and F, and to interpret each member of a variation pair in the context to which it belongs by a method of oppositional contrasting. Some critical assertions may be felt to fall a little short of utter persuasiveness. The attempts, for example, to define variation in character and role remain somewhat tenuous: the differences between Q and F in the part of Kent may in the end not suffice to differentiate two Kents; or, more importantly, the undeniable reinforcement of F by structurally employed language (notably in the imagery of divestiture) to support the course of events through which Lear is taken may yet not define a revision in the role of the King (one might, for example, prefer to speak instead of a parallel linguistic plotting, an abstraction, as it were, of the Lear story into language). Nevertheless, the essays, both singly and cumulatively, serve significantly to strengthen the two-version hypothesis that engendered them.

The hermeneutic method of argument must of course be safeguarded against the danger of question-begging circularity. Such safeguarding is a task that the later essays in the volume — by Randall McLeod, John Kerrigan, Paul Werstine, MacD. P. Jackson and, again, Gary Taylor — progressively fulfill. Continuing in the mode of genetic criticism through interpretation by oppositional contrasting, they increasingly reflect upon the method itself and reinforce its results that favour Shakespeare's revision by systematically exploring and rejecting potential alternative grounds for the Q:F variation observed. The interpretative process of oppositional contrasting of variants is itself given a highly important theoretical reinforcement in Randall McLeod's contribution. His notion of "coordinate differentiation of Q and F" as a procedure of criticism where, at the same time, it is "the textual critic [who] searches out the bias of contextualizing" (p. 165) raises the genetic criticism practised in his essay, as in most of the others, to the level of reflected principle. Incidentally, too, McLeod breaks new ground for procedures of bibliographical investigation by regularly resorting to a "photo-quotation" of the original printed texts. The attention to iconic detail of the settings-in-type which it allows demonstrably increases the potential to differentiate between transmissional and non-transmissional causes for variation between Q and F. From a sample demonstration of microscopic details of the Folio typesetting, McLeod is able to suggest that the Folio compositors cannot be held responsible for Folio variation in specific instances. This contention subsequently returns, generalised, as a central proposition of Paul Werstine's essay. The most strictly bibliographical contribution to the volume, it drastically revises earlier notions about Folio editors and Folio compositors, reducing the potential of variation attributable to them and correspondingly enlarging the scope of the critical argument for authorial revision.

To focus the better the modes of variation specific to revision, John Kerrigan contrasts them with textual changes typically resulting from purposeful adaptation in Jacobean drama, and MacD. P. Jackson differentiates authorial revision from variation for which

annotators or actors might be thought responsible. Within the continuing argument of the collection, this, together with Gary Taylor's rejection, in his first essay in the volume, of censorship as a significant cause for Folio variation from the Q text, finally sets the stage for Gary Taylor's extensive and complex discussion of the date and authorship of the Folio version. He contends that the revision resulting in the Folio text started from a copy of Q (which itself therefore represents *King Lear* as played in 1606) and must hence postdate its publication in 1608. In the Folio revisions, he observes a notable reduction of verbally verifiable references to *Lear*'s original sources and, at the same time, an influx of source material otherwise relevant to plays of Shakespeare's post-*Lear* period. In addition, he adduces vocabulary tests that show statistically significant correlations between Folio *Lear* and the plays known to have been written after *Coriolanus* and before *Cymbeline*. Critically, he convincingly argues for stylistic similarities between longer Folio-only passages and the plays of that period. The linguistic and stylistic evidence effectively reduces or excludes the possibility that a hand other than Shakespeare's was responsible for the revisions, and the conclusion is that Shakespeare composed his second version of *King Lear* between 1608 and 1610.

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The ground, then, is prepared for two independent versions of *King Lear* to be read, analysed, and played on the stage. The process of editing each version is fraught with problems of detail. Yet the new Oxford Shakespeare edited by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor puts the results before us, and we shall see how the new texts answer to the textual and critical claims made for them and developed over ten years. Shakespeare's legacy as originally preserved in Quarto and Folio, the two versions of *King Lear* renewed may become, too, a legacy to the future of 20th century textual scholarship and Shakespeare criticism.

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