What We Owe to Editors

ERNE, Lukas Christian

Abstract
An assessment of how editors shape the Shakespearean text as we read it today.

about the play, and it is not impossible that a novelty of fact or of theory will at some point significantly shift our beliefs about the two texts. The forthcoming publication of the MLA New Variorum *King Lear*, for which the editor, Richard Knowles, deeply distrusting the Folio text, uses quarto Lear as his foundation, will inevitably provide information that to us is novel. In the meantime, as the implications of Paul Werstine's demonstration of the facts about extant manuscript playbooks are absorbed (*Early Modern Playhouse Manuscripts and the Editing of Shakespeare*, 2012), New Bibliographical certitudes about texts printed from holograph versus texts printed from playbooks will almost certainly be discarded and beliefs about the early printings will surely shift. But whatever the fate of the two-text narrative and whatever the future of *King Lear* editing, that explosive moment in 1980 and its aftermath have had a markedly salutary effect on Shakespeareans' relationship to the texts they study and teach. I would think it impossible for any such scholar today to be unaware of the basic facts about the kinds of choices editors make and the beliefs about the early printed texts that lie behind such choices. Shakespeareans now know that when they select an edition, they are deciding to trust its editor and his or her editorial beliefs and assumptions. We editors, too, have been sharply reminded that our assumptions about the quartos and the Folio have a powerful influence over our editorial practices. Instead of waiting for another paradigm shift, we can ourselves ponder the validity of what we have been taught and what we believe, and we can subject every textual narrative to clear-eyed analysis. Such skeptical awareness may be the ultimate gift of the revisionists' coup; if so, it is a gift worthy of every Shakespearean's gratitude.

**What We Owe to Editors**

**Lukas Erne**

It is easy to complain about editors. They waste time and energy on commas, collation, and compositors. Their work is cumulative and mechanical, not worthy of the recognition that comes with essays and monographs. It is also derivative, and so editors embed in their editions the oppressive ideology of their predecessors and thereby perpetuate it. They misrepresent the original text, impose artificial clarity upon it, close down its openness. They add to the original text. They rewrite the author in their own image. Editors do not annotate enough, or they drown the text in commentary. They write incomprehensible collation notes that no one cares about. They base their editorial decisions on unverifiable hypotheses about the provenance of texts. There are also far too many Shakespeare editors. They repeat each other, and themselves. They are only in it for the money. All these complaints are well known. Some of them are even justified, sometimes.

What may be more difficult than complaining about editors is to appreciate what we owe to them. There is a simple reason for this, which is that much of their work tends to be invisible. When we buy Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, we assume the text we read to be Shakespeare's, not the editor's. When readers acquaint themselves with the plays, much of what they know and think about them is derived from editions, yet once they have acquired that knowledge and those opinions it is easy to take them for granted. Editors are the unacknowledged mediators of the word.

Take Shakespeare's dramatic language. Almost all the plays are written in prose and verse, but the early editions are not always a good guide to which bits are prose and which ones verse, nor do they always correctly lineate the verse. Early modern compositors sometimes disrespected the lineation in the manuscript from which they set the text, partly to save or waste space when it suited their purpose. Therefore, it is often up to the modern editor to fix the verse. The recent Arden *Coriolanus* (2013) is a case in point. Even though Peter Holland warns us that the lineation adopted by Shakespeare's eighteenth-century editors is not always satisfactory, and even though he refuses to follow such unsatisfactory relineation and often reverts to that in the First Folio, he nonetheless prints many passages as they were first lineated by eighteenth-century or later editors, drawing seven times on Nicholas Rowe (1709–14), sixty-one on Alexander Pope (1723–5), six on Lewis Theobald (1733), four on Thomas Hanmer (1743–4) and Samuel Johnson (1765), fifteen on Edward Capell (1767–8), four on George Steevens (1773), three on Edmond Malone (1790), and one each on Alexander Dyce (1857), David Bevington (1980), and the Oxford Complete Works (1986). The verse we read today
as Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* in the Arden series thus consists of a transhistorical editorial collage, with more than three hundred lines whose lineation have their origin in the eighteenth century or later. Nor is the Arden *Coriolanus* a special case. Modern editors are essentially in agreement that the lineation proposed in the course of the editorial tradition is often superior to that in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century quartos and folios, and therefore adopt it. Yet many modern readers fail to realize that what we think of as Shakespeare's verse is often a skillful editorial (re-)construction.

It is equally easy to miss how much of the actual text is editorial. Some emendations are well known. Mistress Quickly's description of the dying Falstaff—"his nose was as sharp as a pen, and 'a babbled of green fields" (*Henry V*, 2.3.16–17)—goes back to Theobald, who emended the Folio's "and a Table of green fields." "What's Montague?" Juliet famously asks, and goes on to say, "It is nor hand nor foot, / Nor arm nor face nor any other part / Belonging to a man. O be some other name!" (*Romeo and Juliet*, 2.2.40–2). The passage can be found in no early text but goes back to Malone, who drew on the first and the second quarto to produce it. The nicely chiastic line "A bliss in proof, and proved, / a very woe" in Sonnet 129 is also Malone's, who emended "proud and" to "proved, a." Yet most editorial readings are less well known. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Octavius Caesar, receiving news of Pompey's growing popularity, says:

> It hath been taught us from the primal state
> That he which is was wished until he were,
> And the ebb'd man, ne'er loved till ne'er worth love,
> Comes deared by being lacked. This common body,
> Like to a vagabond flag upon the stream,
> Goes to and back, lackeying the varying tide,
> To rot itself with motion.

(1.4.41–7)

The passage contains two readings first adopted by Theobald, "deared" in line 44 and "lackeying" in line 47, where the Folio has "fear'd" and "lacking." Not only John Wilders's Arden edition (1995), from which I have quoted, adopts it, but so do many others. The quoted speech is no exception: sixty-nine readings in the dialogue text of *Antony and Cleopatra* in the Oxford Complete Works are post-1700 emendations. Today's editors by and large agree that these readings improve on the text in the First Folio and make sense of passages which would otherwise remain obscure. Yet for many modern readers, these editorial improvements pass unnoticed.

Likewise, we easily forget how much of the Shakespearean text we would struggle to understand if editors did not provide notes that conveniently explain it. The early quartos and folios had no annotation, and the editions by Rowe and Pope little of it, but starting with Johnson, editors have undertaken Herculean labors to illuminate the countless words and passages that are far from self-explanatory. If our engagement with Shakespeare today can start from a good level of understanding of the primary text, then that is because modern editions digest in their commentary the scholarly insights of several centuries.

We not only want the dramatic text we read to make sense; we also want to understand the dramatic action with which it goes hand in hand. To help us do so, modern editors add stage directions that allow us to visualize what happens when, who speaks to whom, which characters are present, and when they leave. To choose an edition at random, A. R. Braunmuller (1997), in his *Romeo and Juliet*, 2.2.40–2). The passage can be found in no early text but goes back to Malone, who drew on the first and the second quarto to produce it. The nicely chiastic line "A bliss in proof, and proved, / a very woe" in Sonnet 129 is also Malone's, who emended "proud and" to "proved, a." Yet most editorial readings are less well known. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Octavius Caesar, receiving news of Pompey's growing popularity, says:

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Apart from decisively shaping our reading of Shakespeare's plays, the careful work of editors also helps delimit the canon. Giorgio Melchiori's well-informed edition of *Edward III* in the New Cambridge Shakespeare series in 1998 heralded the play's canonization, now confirmed by its inclusion in the Arden series, the Riverside, and the Oxford *Complete Works*. Brean Hammond's Arden edition of *Double Falsehood* (2010) has been at the heart of a heated debate about the play's Shakespearean credentials. And *The Funeral Elegie for William Peter* briefly rose to fame in the late 1990s, when Donald Foster and Richard Abrams argued for Shakespeare's authorship, until Gilles Monsarrat and Brian Vickers, who have recently included the poem in their edition of
The Collected Works of John Ford (2011), exposed the invalidity of their claims. We may be tempted to think of the contents of a Shakespeare series or "complete works" as a given, but it is not. It is determined by editors.

In recent decades, editors have also done much to help us understand what is at stake in Shakespeare's multiform plays. Not that a consensus has been reached as to the relationship of the texts of, say, King Lear, Hamlet, and Othello. But the terms of the problem have been clearly defined, and no new scholarly edition now pretends that there is simply one play, and that we all know what its text is. Whether they edit all three texts (the Arden Hamlet), both texts (the Oxford Complete Works Lear), a subseries of "early quartos" (the New Cambridge series), or a single conflated text that marks quarto/folio differences with superscript Qs and Fs (the Arden Lear), editions now outline what the options are and which one they have chosen. Nor is there any sign that the importance of Shakespeare's editors will diminish in the near future. At present, many of them are thinking hard about how best to mediate Shakespeare to readers and users in the age of digital reproduction. How exactly the works will reach us in the future we do not currently know, but if the experience of the past four centuries is anything to go by, we can be confident that—whether readers will notice it or not—the editors' mediation will be decisive and enabling.

What's Next in Editing Shakespeare

Sonia Massai

Editing generally features less prominently among the activities organized to celebrate a Shakespeare anniversary than do public performances, exhibitions, or civic displays, but anniversary celebrations certainly seem to catalyze editorial efforts and critical thinking about the principles that inform the re-presentation of Shakespeare to new generations of readers. The monumental Cambridge edition of 1863-6 and its 1864 single-volume Globe Shakespeare companion edition are a case in point. So what kind of landmark is 2016 in relation to the editing of Shakespeare?

In his contribution to Shakespeare in Our Time, Lukas Erne has perceptively captured a renewed sense of optimism in the achievements of the editorial tradition. This optimism is refreshing after post-structuralism and digital technologies in the late twentieth century had called into question the viability, or even the desirability, of methods seeking to recover authorial readings by lifting the veil of print from the early quarto and folio editions of Shakespeare's works. In fact, the combined impact of a post-structuralist critique of the "author" and of the "work" as stable sources of meaning, the unprecedented availability of facsimiles of the early editions of Shakespeare's works online, and the forcible rejection of textual narratives about "good" and "bad" quartos, or "foul papers" and "promptbooks," led late twentieth-century editors and textual scholars to make influential pronouncements about the "End of Editing."

The past few years, leading up to the quatercentenary of Shakespeare's death, have shown that these challenges, rather than the "End of Editing," have actually produced a clearer sense of what editors can and cannot claim to be doing when they edit Shakespeare for twenty-first century readers. The received text of Shakespeare produced by the editorial tradition is no longer understood as a repository of original authorial or theatrical intentions, but it is nevertheless celebrated with renewed enthusiasm as a textual artifact endowed with a vast amount of cultural capital in its own right. As Barbara Mowat shows in this volume, the "End of Editing" can also be said to have produced a salutary amount of "skeptical awareness" toward the changing assumptions and beliefs that have shaped and continue to inform the editorial tradition.

"Shakespeare [editors] in Our Time" have not only become more skeptical about the textual narratives that shaped the editing of Shakespeare in the twentieth century, but they have also started to edit according to principles that diverge quite significantly from those narratives and from the editorial method most influentially theorized by Walter Greg in his "Rationale of Copy-Text" (1950). Instead of editing their copytext critically and eclectically, in light of its assumed provenance ("foul papers" or "promptbook") and the editor's own sense of what may constitute an authorial reading, editors in our time are increasingly practicing "single-text" editing, which involves editing one (or more) early form(s) of a play as