

THE CAMBRIDGE
COMPANION TO
TEXTUAL
SCHOLARSHIP

EDITED BY
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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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HANS WALTER GABLER

Late twentieth-century Shakespeares

Textual scholarship and criticism: the case of *King Lear*

Shakespearian textual scholarship was driven, for the larger part of the twentieth century, by twin forces of select methodology. One was the transfer of the ways of text-critical treatment of the medieval dispersion of texts in manuscripts to the early post-Gutenberg transmissions of texts through books. The other, closely related, was its submission to analytical and textual bibliography. In this doubly determined field of force, Shakespearian textual scholarship rose to ever greater heights of sophistication, and indeed achievement. Yet, in the final quarter of the century, its dogmatisms (unhinged ultimately, too, by wider understandings of textual criticism such as those offered in Jerome J. McGann's *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (1983) and debated in the pages of the journal *TEXT*) were shaken by pragmatic challenges from literary as well as theater-oriented Shakespeare criticism. The moment for retrenchment arrived with the re-opening of a long-standing debate over the nature of the differences between the Quarto (1608) and First Folio (1623) texts of *King Lear*. The proposition raised was simple and seemed, from the point of view of an analytically refined bibliography, strangely unsophisticated. Why, it was asked, could it not be that these texts, respectively, represented two distinct versions of the play from Shakespeare's own hand?¹

Why not, indeed. The two-version hypothesis had been a minority opinion at least since Dr. Johnson mooted it in the eighteenth century. In 1931, it was resurrected by the young American scholar, Madeleine Doran.² But she retracted, submitting to (since she felt unable to resist) the contrary verdict of W. W. Greg, most eminent among the eminences of the New Bibliographers of the first half of the twentieth century. Greg's authority was grounded in the application of an all but unrivalled faculty of analytic logic to a rich archival observation and experience. His personal strengths, in turn, were rooted in classical and medievalist methodologies of textual criticism, pivoted on the organicist historicism of stemmatics. He saw the extant earliest printings

of Shakespeare's texts as derivative of lost manuscripts (which of course they are), and perceived them thus in analogy to the late derivations, as they survive in scribal manuscripts, of long-lost originals of classical or medieval texts. What is problematic in this is less the material analogy than the submission of both sets of materials to analogous methodological treatment.

A basic assumption about post-classical and medieval transmissions in the era before printing is that the causes for the textual differences between extant manuscripts lie in scribal error (unintentional slips or intentional changes in copying). With no possibility of authorial correction or revision long after their authors' death, texts inexorably deteriorate through progressive error. The application of analytical thought to error as the one and only category of change permits grouping errors into patterns, tabulating the groupings in the matrix of a family tree or stemma, and using the stemma, in its turn, as a graph to support the rationale for a procedure of re-constructive editing based on the given transmission. While the original at the root of a family tree (by hypothetical definition) is lost, it is posited to harbor the pristine error-free text. This may not always be recoverable; yet the stemma, as a logical construct, will always lead back as far as the evidence permits to one nodal point of presumptive origin. This, in terms of textual criticism as applied to medieval manuscripts, is the archetype.

The stemmatic method's predication on error may, however, and indeed must be seen as the congenital flaw of the textual criticism that W. W. Greg and his fellow New Bibliographers applied to the textual situation of the plays of William Shakespeare. Admittedly, pressing the Shakespearian transmission into this mould of text-critical thought yields, at first sight, exhilarating results. How clean-cut and lean, after all, are the family trees of texts in books! No complex branchings-off, here, into manifold directions: the twig we hold in hand, the text, say, of a play in the First Folio, may have sprouted from one extant antecedent in a quarto; else, it stemmed from a printer's copy in manuscript (it must have done so, even though that manuscript is materially lost); the trunk out of which this manuscript grew was perhaps a scribal transcript directly from an autograph (if the printer's copy wasn't itself such a transcript); and at the root was the author's original – if not, indeed, the author's most original original, his so-called "foul papers," were even themselves the printer's copy. By systemic definition, then, within the stemmatic matrix, a (lost) printer's copy could thus already be the archetype, that is: the document whose text was by logical differentiation of readings recoverable; and in cases where it could be reasoned that the printer's copy was an original in the author's hand, archetype and original became conceptually and logically one.

Archetype-directed text-critical and editorial thinking thus possessed the distinct virtue of rendering a maximum, with luck even an optimum, of original Shakespeare text logically recoverable from the derivative witnesses-in-print to these texts. True with respect to the one-witness (Folio-only) play texts anyhow, the approach was considered applicable, too, in all cases where two surviving witnesses (Quarto and Folio) related linearly to one another because the Folio text (with only the Folio compositors' venial slips) demonstrably reprinted the Quarto text. A difficulty arose, however, when, as in the case of *King Lear*, surviving Quarto and Folio differed in their texts in so complex a manner that a linear derivation of the Folio from the Quarto could not be posited. It was here that habits of stemmatic reconstruction hit back with a vengeance. They failed to be recognized as deeply misleading, since they brought with them, instead, the *jouissance* of inventive hypothesizing. The challenge recognized was to recover, even against the odds of the bewildering and often enough contradictory variation between Quarto and Folio *Lear*, Shakespeare's one and only original text of the play – in other words, by means of text-critical analysis and reasoning to recover the pristine archetype-*cum*-original. The alternative hypothesis was not admitted that there could have been two originals of competitively authoritative and authorial standing. Translated into categories of text-critical analysis, in other words, it was ruled out a priori that the differences between the two printings of the play could reflect acts of revision: based on the one hand on mind-sets of textual criticism derived from pre-Gutenberg situations of transmission, and on the other hand, on the assertion of the First Folio editors that Shakespeare's papers had come into their hands with "scarse a blot" in them. Instead, the variation was considered to have been caused exclusively by errors in transmission.

W. W. Greg and the New Bibliographers wedded bibliography-centered textual criticism to the logical procedures of retrospection towards archetype and original grafted onto the matrix of the stemma. Within this framework was established a hierarchy of reasoning. Among the methods to identify the variation as corruption, bibliographical demonstration or inference took absolute priority. Only where the application of analytical and textual bibliography remained inconclusive were lines of argument admitted that explained differences between texts on critical grounds and considered variation, for example, as originating in the process of composition, resulting from working over and revising a text, or indicating corrections. The author, and authorial writing, in other words, were taken into account only where bibliography failed, and conceded only as a fall-back cause, so to speak, for textual variation. This, as we should not fail to note, is a stance exclusive to Anglo-American, and Shakespearian, textual criticism. Other methodologies

assume composition and revision as causes for textual variation by default, and concede corruption only when critical explanation fails. The empiric truth that all transmission corrupts, elevated to an axiom of bibliography-oriented textual criticism, admittedly coexists easily with the assumption of Shakespeare's (lost, but presumptively recoverable) one and only original text of, say, *King Lear* behind all (by definition corrupt) variation. By contrast, against the strength of the critical axiom that any two or more texts of a work are different because (regardless of interspersed corruption and error) they are meant to be different, the one-and-only-text situation will be posited only when the critical premise remains stubbornly inapplicable to the case in hand. Hence, from the vantage point of critically oriented textual criticism, *King Lear* conforms to a norm defined through methodology not because presumptively reducible to one archetypal original, but instead because it survives in two printed shapes distinguishably retraceable to two separate authorial versions.

The assumption that Quarto and Folio *King Lear* represented two differently corrupted derivations from one authorial text, and one only, did not originate with W. W. Greg and the New Bibliographers. They merely reinforced through analytic logic a majority consensus going back to the earliest days of Shakespeare editing in the eighteenth century. Dr. Johnson's gesture of critically intuiting two versions³ went, even then, against the grain of a text-critical awareness and editorial practice trained on the analysis of transmissions of classical texts, and their editing. What this entailed when, in the face of the transmission of *King Lear*, it was assumed that the divergent Quarto and Folio derived from one common lost original, was an eclectic conflation of the transmitted texts into one edited text. This editorial stance inherited from the eighteenth-century gentlemen editors did not change when, in the twentieth century, the New Bibliographers, with W. W. Greg foremost among them, established "bibliography and textual criticism" as an autonomous discipline (and went so far even as to seek to re-define it as a science). It was in Shakespearian textual criticism and editing, above all, that the methodologies of this would-be science were developed. They were dominantly formalist, and thus distinctly not hermeneutically critical. Under the aegis of bibliography-centered textual criticism, consequently, the problem of editing *King Lear* was not critically re-assessed. On the contrary: the model of eclectically conflated editing that it represented was raised from an intuitive to a would-be scientific practice. More, therefore, was at stake in Greg's silencing Madeleine Doran than a male-chauvinist (or avuncular) saving the neophyte from errors of judgment through the initiate's higher insight. For at bottom, to admit that *King Lear* could have come down to us in two versions would have rocked the foundations of a school of textual criticism whose newly developed bibliographical methodology was

seen as a triumphant re-enforcement of the stemmatic thinking of old in the discipline.

As a result of the twentieth-century division of the kingdoms of textual criticism and literary criticism – the scholarship *versus* criticism schism – literary criticism progressively lost awareness of its roots in the scrutiny of the authenticity and transmission of the texts it analyzed and interpreted. The new critics, and the multiple theorists who followed in their wake, even the new historicists, ceased to integrate textual study into their thinking or their teaching, and so largely ceded the field to the scholars. Paradoxically, however, this development liberated the literary and theater-oriented Shakespeare critic of the latter half of the twentieth century, too, from constraints ingrained in the traditions of textual criticism and editing. It was thus that Steven Urkowitz, for one, found sufficient scope for the critical enquiries leading to his book *Shakespeare's Revision of King Lear*, of 1980. He took a hard look at Kent's encounter with the Gentleman in the current conflated editions (*King Lear*, III.i). By critically looking at the progression of the argument as well as of the dramaturgy, he found the scene in practice unplayable. So, slighting all mediation via editorial rationale, edited text, apparatus, and explanatory notes, he turned as a critic, not as an editor, straight to the Quarto (Scene 11) and Folio (Act III, Scene 1) source texts – only to find that the scene's difficulties vanished. In each text, he discovered, the relation of the characters, the dialogue line, and the overall dramatic situation were in themselves consistent. They were simply different.

Needless to say, this one demonstration would not by itself prove revision, let alone sustain a claim that the revision was Shakespeare's. Yet it provided a seminal example from which to generate a two-version hypothesis for the *King Lear* transmission. Urkowitz's book is consequently concerned throughout with recurrent patterns of variant theatrical realization, and with variant character conception. It does not initially urge its title. Instead, it at first rather defuses the issue of authorial origin of the textual and stage-play variation by not insisting that the evident differences were of Shakespeare's own making. It is only when brought to full awareness of the quality and internal consistency-in-heterogeneity of the textual and theatrical variants that the reader is induced into also considering that they are most likely, on the whole, to have originated with William Shakespeare. This overall rhetorical gesture highlights the two-fold argument necessary to establish a renewed understanding of the Shakespeare transmission. By one of its strands, it maintains that there are demonstrable cases comprised within that transmission where plays have come down to us not merely in differently corrupt derivations from one (lost) original, but indeed in genuinely different versions. The second strand of the argument is intent on making out the versional differences (those, for instance, represented by the Quarto and

Folio texts of *King Lear*, respectively) as most easily – which means: by the most economic hypothesis – accountable for as Shakespeare’s own.

This double-pronged attack amounted to a shifting of the ground for Shakespeare criticism and textual criticism alike. The debate it elicited was controversial when at its height in the 1980s. For *King Lear*, it culminated in the volume of essays *The Division of the Kingdoms*, edited by Gary Taylor and Michael Warren in 1983. The book starts out from a historical framing of the whole *King Lear* question, followed by cameo pieces of genetic criticism simply taking the two-version hypothesis for granted. Thence it progresses, via essays reflecting on method so as to safeguard against a question-begging circularity of interpretative argument, to, finally, suggesting a place (a copy of the Quarto of 1608) and a time (between 1608 and 1610) for the Folio revisions. For all the shifting positions taken over the past quarter-century on many specific issues raised in *The Division of the Kingdoms*, what may safely be stated in looking back is that the book has turned tables in Shakespeare criticism and textual criticism. The onus of proof was soon, and is meanwhile altogether, no longer on the proponents of the two-version hypothesis, but rather on those who reject it outright, or (as one occasionally finds) still remain uneasy about it. By assuming that Shakespeare was a revising author like other authors, and recognizing that the material transmission of *King Lear* held substantial evidence to prove the contention (notwithstanding the encomium of his first editors that they had “scarse receiued from him a blot in his papers”), the proponents jointly succeeded in bringing Shakespeare textual criticism in line with the discipline of textual criticism as internationally and trans-nationally conceived and practiced. The fresh light cast initially on *King Lear* has in the meantime been rewardingly focused, too, on the transmission of several other plays, with *Hamlet* foremost among them.

With this, the scene has been set for a re-integration of textual criticism and literary criticism. A recent volume of essays on *King Lear* shows this process happily in action.⁴ The volume opens, after a comprehensive introduction by the volume editor, on a subtle double-take on the two-texts *versus* one-text question. The two essays, R. A. Foakes, “The reshaping of *King Lear*”, and Richard Knowles, “The evolution of the texts of *Lear*” constitute a seeming acknowledgment that both hypotheses still represent genuine options for understanding the *Lear* situation.⁵ But in truth, their juxtaposition subverts that assumption. Richard Knowles’s contribution, soundly in terms of old-school bibliographic scholarship, insistently quantifies its evidence and hence, by dint of its own method, neither seeks nor reaches critical conclusions, but instead throws out a wide net of *ex negativo* reasoning to avoid having qualitatively to associate the differences between quarto-attested and folio-attested text with William Shakespeare. R. A. Foakes’s

essay, though likewise in substance a text-critical investigation, operates, by contrast, from stringently hermeneutical premises. It concludes that holding Shakespeare responsible for the essential differences between the texts as transmitted – that is, to assume that Shakespeare revised *King Lear* – represents the likeliest, because it constitutes the most economical hypothesis to govern the two-text situation. Here, over and above a factual (quantitative) assembly of the variation, in other words, a qualitative leap is made to its critical assessment. This is an opening toward re-integrating textual and literary scholarship in a mode of critical scholarship capable of leaving behind, in our twenty-first century, modes of positivism grounded in nineteenth-century stances of learning.

Critical procedure trained on approaches of intertextual study may fruitfully be adapted to intratextual exploration, often known, too, as genetic criticism. In terms of textual criticism, accepting the two-version hypothesis for *King Lear* has mainly, perhaps, brought with it a soberer view of conditions and facts determining the composition and transmission of texts. Still more importantly, surely, it has generated insight in genuinely critical terms. From the debate over the two-version hypothesis for *King Lear*, we now know more than could previously be known about the work's problems of structure, be it in terms of theme, plotting or timing. The play's two versions – that is: the work's distinct texts – offer variant solutions to these problems. The theme of war, for instance, is differently treated in the versions: the plotting of the play as attested in the quarto culminates explicitly in a situation of war with France, whereas the folio-attested version plots the action resulting from Lear's abdication as a chronic state of civil war.⁶ Collaterally, this altered thematic perspective has the effect of speeding up the action that at times, through too much incident, threatens to stagnate through the play's second half in the quarto-attested version. The artistic will to change appears to have been quite ruthless. For, most spectacularly – and to many a critic, disturbingly – one of the work's outstandingly memorable scenes fell victim to the replotting. This is the mock trial of Lear's daughters held in the hovel on the heath.⁷ Its absence from the folio-attested text, admittedly, is critically hard to swallow as an act of revision. But if it is so accepted, as it must be under the two-version hypothesis as a whole, it is most easily acceptable as removed on highest revisional authority, which would mean: by Shakespeare, the revising author, himself.

Shakespeare's creatively renewed composition in revision may indeed be inferred, too, from many a textual detail reinforcing the thematic, dramatic, and poetic overall shape of the play in its First Folio version. Gary Taylor, for instance, in *The Division of the Kingdoms*, assumes that Shakespeare, in order to revise the play, re-read *King Lear* in a copy of the Quarto of 1608.⁸ The assumption implies that he had the entire text as achieved in 1605/1606

freshly before him when he undertook to alter it. This proposition, in turn, puts the critic in a position to assess, in some significant instances, where revising meant working over the text retrospectively so as to render it more consciously prospective in its ultimate unfolding. For instance, when Lear in the hovel on the heath asks to be assisted in stripping off his clothes, the quarto-attested version reads: “off off you lendings, come on.” Only the folio-attested version has: “Off, off you Lendings: Come, vnbutton here.” Interpretatively, one would suggest that it was out of Lear’s dying words from the very end of the play, “Pray you undo this Button,” that the revision at the play’s mid-point was generated. Similarly, it is the quarto-attested version that, in the first act’s first encounter between Lear, the Fool, and Kent in disguise, already chimes insistently on the word “nothing” (“Kent: This is nothing Foole. . . . Foole: . . . *(to Lear)* can you make no vse of nothing Nuncke? Lear: Why no Boy, nothing can be made out of nothing.”). In terms of the play’s progressive composition by way of revision, consequently, it is a pre-echo of this passage that gets worked into the folio-attested text at the all-important moment in the opening scene when Cordelia refuses to say / to speak what Lear expects to hear from her: “Lear: Nothing? Cordelia: Nothing.” These two lines, inserted, are to be found in the First Folio text only.

The abdication scene reveals altogether, and most richly, a creatively revisional energy lavished on it. The scene is reinforced in expositional precision (all acting characters, for example, are now named in the spoken dialogue, not merely indicated in stage directions and speech prefixes). Thematic oppositions such as age and infirmity versus youth and strength, or nature versus merit, gain explicitness in language and dialogue. Through ampler pacing, the scene is most sensuously set swinging. The dialogue, and above all the King’s speeches, expand in reverberations of metaphor, simile, and imagery. The images of clothing, divestiture, and the unburdened crawling to death, by which we so vividly experience the drama of the abdicating king, appear, on comparative analysis of the play’s two versions, for the first time in its folio-attested text. That emotive cluster of images, all engendered from language and imagery elaborated in the play’s later progression as already shaped in the quarto-attested version, represents quintessentially Shakespeare’s creatively retrospective revision for prospective effects to the poetic and dramatic progression of *King Lear*.

The resurgence of criticism in editing: the Oxford edition

What after more than two decades meanwhile stands out clearly, is that the *King Lear* debate importantly paved the way, as well, for the arrival –

meaning, too: the controversial reception – of the one-volume Oxford edition of the *Works of William Shakespeare*, edited by Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, and their associates, and published in 1986.⁹ It is the latest to date in the line of ground-breaking editions of Shakespeare's plays, or works, that have had a habit of appearing at roughly century-long intervals: 1623, the First Folio; 1709, Nicholas Rowe's multi-volume, play-by-play edition (the first in the rapid sequence of editions by named editors in the course of the eighteenth century); 1803, Samuel Johnson's and Isaac Reed's Variorum Edition (textually based on George Steevens's and Edmund Malone's historically founded reassessments of Shakespeare's texts); and 1863–6 the (Old) Cambridge Edition, again edited from the ground up, and textually providing the standard for Shakespeare editions through most of the twentieth century. The edition of 1986 – having, with some modifications to its editorial solutions, meanwhile also become a Norton Shakespeare¹⁰ – may be expected to be the edition for the twenty-first century. It could not have been edited without the encompassing achievements of Shakespearian textual scholarship as engendered through analytical and textual bibliography throughout the twentieth century. Nor, however, could it have been conceived and realized without the new openings, both editorial and critical, implicit in the debate over *King Lear*.

Among the multiplicity of Shakespeare editions produced and published in the twentieth, and continuing to appear in the twenty-first century, the Oxford edition of 1986 is the one edition of the present age that reassesses the textual situation radically and comprehensively from the surviving sources of the transmission, the quarto and folio original printings. If herein it renews the bids of comparable scope made at the end of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it is singular in its ambition to transcend the strictures of methodology-bound editorial scholarship. In establishing its edition text, rather, it welds the critical to the text-critical perspective. Therein, it extends the critical scholarship exercised in the *Lear* debate to encompass the Shakespearian oeuvre as a whole. It is thus the *Lear* debate and the Oxford edition together that, in terms of the main argument of the present essay, exemplify the resurgence of textual criticism as criticism in late twentieth-century Shakespeare studies.

The Oxford edition departs radically from the main critical, textual, and editorial traditions going all the way back to the First Folio of 1623. The First Folio canonized the Shakespearian transmission by the force of its disposition that originated with the volume's editors. These were, on the one hand, members of Shakespeare's own theater company. On the other hand, the editorial syndicate comprised the several printers sharing the entrepreneurial risk of posthumously monumentalizing Shakespeare. As likely as not, it was mainly the publishers who urged a bookish disposition of the texts

themselves at the “interface” level of the book pages. An instance of this disposition is to be seen in the fact that the plays, in the First Folio, are (with varying insistence) divided into acts and scenes. The introduction of act-and-scene divisions goes together with the literary (and ultimately “classical”) claim made for the Shakespearian oeuvre by compartmentalizing his plays into three generic categories: Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies. Over the centuries, this division has become engraved ever more deeply in next-to-innumerable Shakespeare editions, and consequently adopted, too, as an encompassing matrix for Shakespeare scholarship and criticism. By the agency of the first collected edition of his works, Shakespeare, the playwright, became an author under a literary rather than a theatrical dispensation. Whereas his fellow-actors John Heminge and Henry Condell, as editors, underscore how carefully the texts that they offer “To the great Variety of Readers” were written, they say nothing about how they were played. They fashioned Shakespeare into a writer containable in a book, and in book conventions of textual representation. “Shakespeare the book,” moreover, was designed to be read: divided into its three main sections, as well as carefully patterned in the layout of its pages, the First Folio favors a reading encounter with Shakespeare’s plays.

The one-volume Oxford edition revitalizes in one significant respect the First Folio’s mode of presentation. Its pages are text pages only, wholly without annotation, and arranged in two columns to the page. Its “first-folio” reading effect has both an aesthetic and a didactic dimension. Page size and double-column printing perceptibly shape a play in its large structural outlines. The text gathers pace in the reading from its unbroken sweep over the pages as from a sweep of action on the stage. The Norton edition, by contrast, does not emulate this gesture of staging in the book design. It is consciously a book, and in this a study edition with a careful layering of editorial mediation, both through introductory essays and on-the-page elucidations of the plays’ language.

While adhering in terms of its page design to the book tradition instituted by the First Folio, the Oxford edition in other respects breaks trebly with that first edition’s fashioning of William Shakespeare. First, it abandons the generic in favor of a chronological ordering of the plays. Secondly, while the First Folio contains thirty-six plays only, the Oxford edition utilizes its break with the generic ordering to incorporate, with these, not only plays of Shakespeare’s authorship or part-authorship excluded from the First Folio, but his short epics and lyric poetry as well. As against the edition of 1623, the edition of 1986 expands into an edition of Shakespeare’s complete works. Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, the Oxford edition endeavors to edit Shakespeare’s plays in versions. Its greatest momentum inheres in its principle of establishing, wherever possible, the text of a given play closest

to performance (or, to overstate the principle: of giving a company text in preference to a pure author text). A performance text, where identifiable, is a version text. To think editorially in terms of versions follows, as we have already argued, from assuming a revising author. Evidently, the edition thus intimately conjoins editorial and critical parameters in its design.

Over the four centuries of Shakespeare transmission that originated in the First Folio, its generic ordering has provided a formidable a priori matrix, regardless of inconsistencies. The “Tragedies” section in the First Folio, for instance, is strangely framed by the apparent non-tragedies *Troilus and Cressida* and *Cymbeline* (and of these, moreover, *Troilus and Cressida* is even missing from the list of contents, the typographic show-piece headed “CATALOGVE of the seuerall Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies contained in this Volume”). But this never led to manifest counter-measures in the course of the later editorial tradition. Rather, on the grounds that the Folio editors must have erred, these plays were critically either reasoned out of any “tragedy” status, or, conversely, they were, off and on, actually reasoned into such a status by the pull of the Folio’s generic grouping. As to the “Histories” it explicitly introduces, the First Folio is, doubtless, genuinely innovative: “Histories” is not a classic, but a specifically Elizabethan dramatic genre. The First Folio’s grouping of the plays it considers belonging to the genre has distinctly furthered a sense, in later traditions of Shakespeare criticism, of a comprehensive design, for instance, of two tetralogies on British history, regardless of the circumstance (as it has become increasingly researched) that Shakespeare constantly switched genres as he moved in his writing from one play to the next. The First Folio’s strict compartmentalizing of his oeuvre into genres goes totally against the grain, too, of that overarching quality of Shakespeare’s art, its highly effectful mixing of genres in next to every individual play.

Nonetheless, nobody had ever, before the Oxford edition, attempted to replace the generic by a chronological ordering of the oeuvre. This could simply not have been done without the historical and documentary research into Shakespeare and the English Renaissance accomplished in the twentieth century. Naturally, though, the Oxford editors needed to justify their procedure. The edition’s *Textual Companion* volume contains a chronological essay that, as it were, plots the sequential make-up of the text volumes of the *Works of William Shakespeare*. Between its modern-spelling and original-spelling text volumes, however, as well as meanwhile in its successive printings, the edition has entered into dissent even with itself. Owing to adjustments in the reasoning for the chronology, the order of the plays has repeatedly shifted. Blocks of pages have physically been moved so as to keep the book structure abreast with the reconsidered chronology.

The one-volume Oxford edition, then, comprises the entire Shakespearian oeuvre in all its genres. In its overall conception, it turns to editorial account the range of debate of Shakespearian scholarship and criticism of the twentieth century. The way this edition now images Shakespeare differs fundamentally from the image of the author conveyed by Shakespeare's own contemporaries by means of the First Folio. This is borne out above all by its most controversial feature, namely, to present the plays in versions, wherever the evidence of the transmission so permits. Versions in the sense of the Oxford edition may be authorial versions, if they can be ascertained, as in the case of *King Lear*, for which the edition expressly establishes and presents two separate texts: *The History of King Lear*, and *The Tragedy of King Lear*. Yet theater versions are equally aimed at, shaped from authorial text by the company of players. Procedurally, the transmissions of the individual play texts have been closely scrutinized for evidence pointing to revision either in the course of composition or, significantly too, in the theater. The resulting edition texts represent endeavors to capture individual plays in a shape as close as possible to how they were communally texted and staged by the Lord Chamberlain's / King's Men, rather than exclusively as they were, in origin, drafted and written by William Shakespeare alone. In terms of presentation, transmitted text overflowing the bounds of the critically determined and editorially established versions, is in each case given as appended matter.

More comprehensively than in the individual reassessment of *King Lear*, this conception for an edition, and concomitant editorial policy, is an outcome of the interest in the theatrical nature of Shakespeare's plays resurgent in the latter half of the twentieth century. It takes measures against the received format of Shakespeare editions, which do not, on the whole, support explorations of the plays' theatricality. By standard precepts of textual criticism and procedures of editing, instead, play texts too, as a rule, are and have been editorially seen and presented as book texts. Far too often, the cumulation of all text felt to have the true Shakespearian ring has been considered to result in the best, since most comprehensive, editions. But these have not, generally, yielded playable texts. Admittedly, it is through books that dramatic texts in general come down to us, and Shakespeare's texts do so without exception. Yet this should not free the editor from taking account of their specific, performance-related textuality. Not to do so vitiates the theatrical potential inherent in the transmitted textual substratum of plays – demonstrably so, as we have seen, in the case of *King Lear*, where dramatic structures were effectively destroyed by the bookishly edited conflated text. As for theatrical and stage matters in bookish editions, these have commonly found their way at most into annotation, so as to render the edited texts more determinate as reading texts. For it is with readers far

more than with theater practitioners in mind that editors have customarily marked act and scene divisions, localities, dramatic situations, or even entrances and exits, gestures, props, and general stage business. Often, the book-edited texts have, on the one hand, been over-determined as reading texts, in ways alien to Elizabethan practices of performance; on the other hand, they have seldom been editorially shaped out of a searching regard for the larger dramatic and theatrical sweep of performance texts.

The 1986 Oxford edition, by contrast, adumbrates, where the evidence from the textual transmission permits, the shape of a Shakespearian play on the stage of Shakespeare's theater company. It so endeavors to provide texts that are as close as possible to the theater. As a theatrically aware edition, however, it is erected according to the sophisticated standards of professionalism reached in Shakespeare editing by the end of the twentieth century. These standards it has itself, in fact, helped to advance. This is true not only with respect to the computer assistance it calls upon even just to keep the wealth of editorial material under control, or, say, to conduct research into questions of authorship or chronology. The advancement of editing standards is to be observed also in the mode the edition adopts to mediate its rationale and decisions to readers and users. The listings in the *Textual Companion* volume of variants for the individual plays, in particular, liberally employ natural language rather than the semiotics of editorial symbols to explain textual decisions, and so go a long way towards making the less-than-expert user of the edition understand textual problems and their solution.

But by so discoursing its own procedures and decisions, the edition not only insists – and rightly so – on demonstrating that textual criticism and editing, by virtue of being critical activities, are always areas of debate; and that to consider them as merely legislative of “right” or “wrong,” were to mistake their nature. A central tenet of the Oxford edition is that “no edition of Shakespeare can or should be definitive.” Quite naturally by such a stance, it also opens itself up to genuine controversy. Notoriously (in terms of reactions provoked), for example, the text established for 1 *Henry IV* names the character Oldcastle who subsequently, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, 2 *Henry IV* and *Henry V*, carries the name of Falstaff – which, in fact, he already does, too, in the earliest extant textual witness to 1 *Henry IV*, namely the Quarto of 1598. The Oxford edition emends, in other words, the material text on which it is based; or, in terms of what can be inferred about the state of the text in composition, the edition restores what Shakespeare originally wrote. There can be little doubt that Shakespeare did first give his stage character the historical name. The combined external and internal evidence adduced seems convincing enough. It comes, on the one hand, from records of protest from the historical Oldcastle's descendants

against the portraiture of their ancestor by name in Shakespeare's play; and, on the other hand, from a minute metrical analysis revealing that, where the character is named in versified contexts in the play, the manifest reading "Falstaff" of two syllables disturbs the metrical expectation of a word of three syllables, such as "Oldcastle."

Yet if so much may be analytically ascertained – what options does an editor, and does an edition, have to act? Say, the editorial procedure is governed by the rules of copy-text editing; then the copy-text – in the nomenclature of the Oxford edition, the "control text" – will be followed unless the editor critically determines that the copy-text reading results from an error of transmission. In the case in point, it is clear from the metrical disturbance that a change has occurred in the transmission behind the Oxford edition's control text; and what is more, the surrounding circumstances safely suggest that the change has been from "Oldcastle" to "Falstaff." The question then remains, was this an error of transmission, or was it, say, a revision? Or should a third category be invoked, namely coercion through censorship? This is what the Oxford editors opted for when, countermanning the coercion, they decided to restore in their edited text the name that Shakespeare originally gave the character. In view of the evidence, it was, editorially, not "wrong" to do so; nor, however, was it unambiguously "right." It was an editorial decision by judgment call – which is how editors' decisions in establishing texts should largely be recognized. In the case in hand, were the critical assessment of the variant to shift, the drift of the editorial decision would alter. The Oxford editors need not be followed in their rejecting the reading they impute to censorship; for it is simply moot, in terms of editorial procedure, whether it should be considered obligatory to eliminate interventions of censorship in critically establishing an edition's text. The simpler question remaining is then whether the variant, "Falstaff" (testified) for "Oldcastle" (inferred), be an error of transmission or not. If not, the change (critically posited) will be assessed as a willed revision – actually, an ingenious one! – which, by force of editorial method, must be accepted as offered by the control text. "Falstaff," when granted the critical weight of a revision, gains collateral support, moreover, from the consistent linking of character and name in all four of the *Henry IV / Merry Wives of Windsor / Henry V* plays as they have materially come down to us.

Errors of transmission aside, which by common rules of editing need to be eliminated, it is in the forms in which they have been preserved, ultimately, rather than in the undocumented and therefore mostly indeterminate variant shapes Shakespeare first wrote them in, that his plays have established their theatrical tradition, as well as their textual one. The theatrical shape of Shakespeare's plays, as we have already emphasized, provided a dominant focus for the Oxford edition. As a name, "Falstaff" is inscribed in the

theatrical tradition. For this reason, too, it was a trifle inconsistent, in terms of the edition's sense of versions, to have called the antagonist of *1 Henry IV* "Oldcastle" in the edited text, notwithstanding the fact that this was near-to-demonstrably Shakespeare's original name for him. As the flaw this retro-naming is, however, it shows up in a nutshell, too, into what complexities editorial reasoning may at times be running, and it consequently moves into focus how needful it is that editors as well as users and readers of editions engage critically with transmitted and edited texts.

Looking at the alternatives of adjudication in this one instance: is "Falstaff" an error of transmission; the coerced response to censorship; a revision; or authenticated by tradition; one begins to realize that larger issues are at stake. Of the options for assessment, it is especially the last that touches not only on the enterprise of the Oxford edition of the *Works of William Shakespeare* as a whole, but impinges equally on theorizable assumptions by which we understand and categorize authorship, oeuvres, works, texts and editions; as does, similarly, the *King Lear* issue discussed above. The focus on "Oldcastle" versus "Falstaff" is author-centered and concerned with authority. In this one instance of an alternative, as with the two whole versions of *King Lear*, we are faced with initial and revised authorial text competing for authority in editorial terms. For *King Lear*, it is possible to differentiate two whole texts and to edit each on its own textual authority. Between "Oldcastle" and "Falstaff," on the other hand, one must decide; it is impossible to uphold both names in editorial, and thus textual, parallel or simultaneity. In terms of textual criticism, and Anglo-American editorial rationale in particular, one has customarily at this point taken recourse to the tranquillizer of authorial intention: "Falstaff," as the revised reading, is declared to overwrite, on the strength of later authorial intention, the reading "Oldcastle" that precedes it. This is likely to be true, factually. Yet it remains a hermetically author-centered reasoning. It has little regard for the autonomy a text attains in its accomplishment. The progression of Falstaff through *1 Henry IV*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *2 Henry IV*, and *Henry V* is the progression of an autonomous fictional character through texts originally conceived and written by Shakespeare. Yet the fictional character acquires autonomous agency, too, in that he contributes directly, in his turn, to constituting these texts as accomplished works, as well as to linking these works into a quadruple sub-unit of the dramatic oeuvre. In the larger perspective, furthermore, the oeuvre must then be seen as determined not solely by the author, Shakespeare, in complicity with his fictional characters, but together with a company of players as well, the Lord Chamberlain's / King's Men. Indeed, it is on the joint realization of the oeuvre in writing, on the stage and in an edition, the First Folio, that the afterlife of "Shakespeare," and with him Falstaff, depends.

Such might be the reasoning for the Oxford edition's choice to edit "Shakespeare," that is, wherever possible to edit theater versions from the earliest surviving evidence to Shakespeare's plays in quartos and First Folio. The implications are momentous. For all its endeavor of meticulously preserving and restoring Shakespearian text in detail, the edition's focus, when taken in as a whole, is no longer exclusively on one author's (Shakespeare's) authentic text. More widely seen, it is on an inherited body of texts as oeuvre that, while it has the general authority of Shakespeare's name behind it, equally carries marks of an authority ramified by transmission through editions, as well as by each fresh performance. The edition is therefore trebly centered: centered on authorship, similarly on text and textual transmission, and on theatrical realization as well. The authenticity, if granted, of the versions of Shakespeare's plays that the edition establishes, rests therefore jointly on foundations of the texts' composition, of their life and after-life on the stage and in their first editions, and, further yet, of their manifold rootedness in the cultural heritage. Such thinking, when pursued to its conclusions, is likely to confine scholarly editing no longer to routines and formalisms trained solely on authorship, authority, intention, or judgmental distinctions between good or bad, right or wrong, readings. Instead, it provides renewed openings for literary criticism to re-integrate textual criticism as one of the fields of its overall hermeneutical endeavor.

Such new openings in Shakespearian editing call upon literary criticism, in turn, to reconsider its bearings. Through the advances in presentation formats of Shakespeare editions over the past couple of decades we are meanwhile provided with paradigms for engaging innovatively with works and their texts. As published in 1986, the one-volume Oxford edition of the *Works of William Shakespeare* offers, as said, two *Lears*: *The History of King Lear*, and *The Tragedy of King Lear*; and it constructs from the transmission, wherever it can, theater (company) versions of the plays. The Norton Shakespeare adoption of 1997 of the Oxford edition goes further yet in the case of *King Lear*: firstly, it prints the *History* and the *Tragedy* not successively, but on facing pages. Secondly, it provides a third rendering of the play in a freshly established conflated version. In so doing, however, it nonetheless does not uphold the claims made for conflated *Lears* for over two centuries, from Alexander Pope to Kenneth Muir. The Norton conflation is no longer given out as the ideal realization closest to William Shakespeare's own authoritative text. Instead, it stages, wholly on the editor's responsibility, a text analogous to any text adaptation that, say, a theater company would feel free, on its artistic responsibility, to assemble for performance. The stance, in other words, is not one of editorially decreeing an authoritative text. Instead, it is reception-oriented. It allies itself with us at the receiving end where we engage with the play – and where in fact Barbara Lewalski, editing the new conflated version, equally engages with

it, as she mediates the work by way of critically merging the texts from the documents of transmission.

Texts become what they are, and what they mean, through critical engagement with them. This is a home truth in literary criticism. The advances in Shakespearian editing through the latter years of the twentieth and meanwhile into the twenty-first century contribute to recognizing that it is valid, all the more strongly, in face of the material evidence as it survives for Shakespeare's texts. Editions are taking a development toward inviting critical engagement with themselves as products of critical scholarship. The prime question to be asked, be it in editorial or in critical terms, is no longer simply the normative one of "what is the work's text?," but rather – and in far greater complexity – the critical one of: "what is the range of variability of the work's text(s), from which we may gain analytic advantage toward interpretation?" Moreover, this is not a recondite question for the scholar in her closet. First and foremost, it has vital repercussions in the classroom. Shakespeare editions are becoming available at an increasingly variegated range: the Oxford and the Norton editions, the growing numbers of quarto-text editions alongside the standard edited-text editions in the several series of one-volume-per-play editions such as the Arden Shakespeare, the facsimile editions, the electronic editions expandable beyond traditional formats to becoming learning sites.¹¹ What brackets them nonetheless is an encompassing perspective. They establish before our very eyes that it is fundamentally in the nature of writing, indeed of language, that texts are variable and can always also be otherwise. Their united challenge is therefore to use to critical advantage the variability in the textual condition that they, as editions, give access to. To acknowledge the nature of the textual condition as one of fundamental variability contributes to securing the theoretical grounding for a re-integration of textual and literary criticism. Perceiving them as integral is, in truth, anything but innovative in an historical perspective. Yet it is, in our day, still a fresh conceptual departure and should affect both sides of the divide between criticism and scholarship that we have perhaps as yet not wholly overcome. Its gains are most likely to be secured through intense debate between orthodox attitudes and new beginnings.

(Bibliographical addendum: Since completing this contribution to the present volume, I have discussed at greater length the issue it takes its departure from, namely the transition from stemmatological to author- and intention-oriented scholarly editing, and W. W. Greg's role therein in "Beyond Author-Centricity in Scholarly Editing." A further recent publication has bearings on the medial shift from book to digital of today that plays a distinct role throughout this volume: "Theorizing the Digital Scholarly Edition." See the "Guide to further reading," at the end of this volume for full bibliographical citations of these essays.)

NOTES

- 1 For the main contributions in support of this position see in particular Michael Warren, "Quarto and Folio *King Lear* and the Interpretation of Albany and Edgar," in *Shakespeare, Pattern of Excelling Nature*, ed. David Bevington and Jay L. Halio (University of Delaware Press, 1978), 95–107; Gary Taylor, "The War in *King Lear*," *Shakespeare Survey*, 33 (1980), 27–34; Steven Urkowitz, *Shakespeare's Revision of King Lear* (Princeton University Press, 1980); Peter W. M. Blayney, *The Texts of King Lear and their Origins*, Vol. 1, (Cambridge University Press, 1982); and, most diversified in its approaches, *The Division of the Kingdoms*, ed. Gary Taylor and Michael Warren (Oxford University Press, 1983; paperback 1987).
Throughout this essay, I draw on three earlier publications of mine: Hans Walter Gabler, "The Two Versions of *King Lear*: A Review Article," *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, 225 (1988), 137–44; Klaus Bartsch and Hans Walter Gabler, "Die zwei Fassungen von Shakespeares *King Lear*: Zum neuen Verhältnis von Textkritik und Literaturkritik," *Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft West: Jahrbuch 1988*, 163–86; Hans Walter Gabler, "Assumptions Fruitfully Disturbed: The One-Volume Oxford Shakespeares," *Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft West: Jahrbuch 1989*, 344–50.
- 2 Madeleine Doran, *The Text of King Lear* (Stanford University Press, 1931).
- 3 See the discussion in Steven Urkowitz, "The Base Shall to th' Legitimate: The Growth of an Editorial Tradition," in Taylor and Warren, eds., *Division*, 23–43, esp. 31–3, with n. 13.
- 4 Jeffrey Kahan, ed., *King Lear: New Critical Essays* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2008).
- 5 *Ibid.*, 104–23; 124–54.
- 6 See Taylor, "The War."
- 7 Roger Warren, "The Folio Omission of the Mock Trial: Motives and Consequences" in Taylor and Warren, eds., *Division*, 45–57.
- 8 Gary Taylor, "King Lear: The Date and Authorship of the Folio Version" in Taylor and Warren, eds., *Division*, 351–468.
- 9 William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, gen. eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); *The Complete Works. Original-Spelling Edition*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986 [1987]); Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, with John Jowett and William Montgomery, *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987 [1988]).
- 10 Stephen Greenblatt *et al.*, ed., *The Norton Shakespeare, Based on the Oxford Edition* (New York: Norton, 1997).
- 11 See for instance a model for an electronic edition of *King Lear*, dynamically relating the versions within the larger framework of an edition as a learning site, devised by Alexandra Braun-Rau: *William Shakespeare's King Lear in seinen Fassungen*. Beihefte zu editio 20 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2004). Electronically, the prototype may be accessed at www.textkritik.uni-muenchen.de/abraun-rau/lear/index.html.