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## The Provenance of the Folio Texts

Amongst one particular group of modern readers, facsimile editions of the 1623 Folio are especially cherished. Actors who specialise in Shakespeare prize the Folio in the belief that it gives virtually unmediated access to the finalised, stage-ready versions of his plays. Some of the credit for this misconception belongs to the acting teacher Doug Moston of New York University, whose introduction to the Applause facsimile claims that ‘The First Folio . . . is the original acting edition of Shakespeare’s plays’ and ‘is the closest version we have to what Shakespeare actually wrote’.<sup>1</sup> But most of the credit must go to Shakespeare’s friends and fellow actors John Heminge and Henry Condell, who in the preliminaries to the Folio seek to bolster the claim on the title page that it was made from ‘the True Original Copies’. Explaining to the aristocratic patrons their role in providing the publisher with Shakespeare’s playscripts, Heminge and Condell write:

We haue but collected them, and done an office to the dead, to procure his Orphanes, Guardians, without ambition either of selfe-profit, or fame: onely to keep the memory of so worthy a Friend & Fellow aliue, as was our SHAKESPEARE (”A2v).

Some of this we know is true: Shakespeare was their fellow actor in the same company and they were close personal friends. Shakespeare left each of them in his will 26 shillings and 8 pence to buy rings to remember him by.<sup>2</sup> Heminge and Condell claim that they were not motivated by self-profit, and we can take that as literally true, since we have no reason to suppose they would have shared in any profits the book might have made. In the event, the Folio did not make its investors rich: Edward Blount was almost bankrupted by it, as was co-investor Andrew Aspley.

In a separate address to the reader in the Folio, Heminge and Condell repeat their claim to be Shakespeare’s friends who merely collected his scripts and turned them over to the publisher. They also make an important assertion about the preceding quarto-format single-play editions: ‘where (before),

you were abus'd with diuerse stolne, and surreptitious copies, maimed, and deformed by the frauds and stealthes of iniurious impostors, that expos'd them: euen those, are now offer'd to your view cur'd, and perfect of their limbes; and all the rest, absolute in their numbers, as he conceiued them' (<sup>π</sup>A<sub>3</sub><sup>r</sup>). The previous quarto editions, they seem to say, were not merely textually imperfect, but were actively dishonest: 'stolne, and surreptitious' made by 'frauds and stealthes'. Now, with the Folio, readers are promised these same plays 'cur'd, and perfect of their limbes' and 'all the rest' – meaning the plays printed for the first time in the Folio – 'absolute in their numbers, as he conceiued them', meaning that Shakespeare would agree that the Folio reflects what he had in mind. These are grand claims, but then Heminge and Condell are trying to help sell a rather expensive book so we should excuse their grandiloquence. Unfortunately, part of Heminge and Condell's claim seems also to be false. To understand why, we must first consider the Folio plays for which there were no preceding quarto editions.

### Plays That First Appeared in the Folio

Of the thirty-six plays in the Folio, twenty had not previously been published:

*The Tempest*

*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*

*Measure for Measure*

*The Winter's Tale*

*Cymbeline*

*The Comedy of Errors*

*As You Like It*

*All's Well that Ends Well*

*Twelfth Night*

*1 Henry VI*

*Coriolanus*

*Timon of Athens*

*Julius Caesar*

*Macbeth*

*Antony and Cleopatra*

*Henry VIII*

*The Taming of the Shrew*

*King John*

*2 Henry VI*

*3 Henry VI*

For the first sixteen of these, the Folio is our only early edition of the play and any modern edition must be based on it and supplemented only by the editor's ability to spot and correct errors in the script. For the last four, there had been earlier publication of a play somewhat similar in title and/or plot and/or language: before *The Taming of the Shrew* there had been *The Taming of a Shrew* (1594); before *King John* there had been the two-part *Troublesome Reign of King John* (1591); before *2 Henry VI* there had been *The Contention of York and Lancaster* (1594); and before *3 Henry VI* there had been *Richard Duke of York* (1595). Textual scholars have argued for centuries about just how these earlier editions are related to the scripts that were printed in the Folio – are they earlier versions of the same plays? sources for them? derived from them? – and there is currently no consensus on the topic. We can at least be sure that the Folio does not simply reprint these earlier editions, for they are far too different. This means that what the printers of the Folio had in their hands – what they used as 'copy' from which to set type for the Folio – were manuscripts of these twenty plays. However, for the last four plays some scholars think that the preceding edition may throw light on Shakespeare's play itself, perhaps because it is derived from it or because it indirectly influenced the Folio as it was being typeset in the printshop, and so they make use of these earlier editions in constructing their modern editions.

For five of these twenty Folio plays printed from manuscripts, we have a good idea who wrote the manuscripts and it was not Shakespeare, but a professional scribe called Ralph Crane. (The word *wrote* is rather over-worked here: Shakespeare wrote the plays in the sense of choosing their words, but a scribe wrote the manuscript by transcribing those words from an earlier manuscript that was either in Shakespeare's handwriting or was itself a still-earlier scribal transcript.) The five plays concerned are *The Tempest*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *Cymbeline*. Crane also supplied the scribal transcript from which the Folio edition of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was set, although this play had previously been published as a quarto in 1602. Just how the manuscript from which the quarto was printed was related to the manuscript from which the Folio was printed twenty years later is, again, uncertain. Some scholars see a parallel with *2 Henry VI / The Contention of York and Lancaster* and *3 Henry VI / Richard Duke of York* and say that in each case we have two plays, while others would say that each pair represents one play that reached print by different means that account for their differing words.

We can tell from the spellings, punctuation and layout of these six plays that the Folio printers' copy was a Crane transcript because they share his

highly distinctive habits of writing found also in the eight surviving dramatic manuscripts in his handwriting, none of which, unfortunately, is a Shakespeare play.<sup>3</sup> Virginia J. Haas usefully categorised Crane's distinctive habits:<sup>4</sup>

The provision of massed entrances. At the start of a scene, Crane lists all the characters needed even if they enter later, part-way through the scene.

The provision of regular act/scene divisions. Early books often omit these, as do theatrical manuscripts where they are unnecessary since a scene break is indicated by a clearing of the stage and needs no further marking.

The amplification of stage directions, especially using literary language.

The expansion of abbreviations of the kind *you'de* > *you would* and *they're* > *they are*, even where this harms the meter.

The avoidance of act and scene headings, stage directions, and speech prefixes in catchwords.

The use of distinctive spellings and abbreviations such as *h'as* for *he has* and *has*, *'em* for *them*, *theis* for *these*, and *wiffe* for *wife*.

The lavish use of certain punctuation marks, especially colons, hyphens, and parentheses, and apostrophes in unelided phrases such as *I'am* and *ye'have*.

The touching up of the tops of certain letters, giving the appearance of an unwanted apostrophe, and the italicizing of titles (*King*, *Prince*) and abstract nouns (*Honor*, *Virtue*).

The omission of certain letters, most prominently *r* to give *fogetting* for *forgetting* and *they* for *their*.

The writing of prose that does not fill the line, so that it looks like verse.

As can be seen from this list, there is likely to be much in a Shakespeare play printed from a Crane transcript that, if we did not know of Crane's involvement, we would mistakenly attribute to the playwright. The rewriting of stage directions is particularly intrusive, although as John Jowett observes, if it was informed by Crane's recollections of seeing the plays in performance – not unlikely for a scribe working extensively with the playing company – this then might throw new light on certain aspects of their staging that are otherwise obscure.<sup>5</sup>

There may be other plays beyond these six for which the Folio copy was a Crane transcript, and *King John*, *2 Henry IV* and *Timon of Athens* have at various times been proposed without being accorded general assent.<sup>6</sup> For the Folio plays printed from manuscripts for which there are no clear signs of Crane's habits, we do not know what kinds of manuscripts they were. Indeed, we know little about the various kinds of play manuscripts that may have existed. It may be that scribes other than Crane were less intrusive in the scripts they transcribed. Indeed, if they were perfectly faithful in their work, no sign of their involvement would exist in the resulting documents

and their transcripts would be indistinguishable from the manuscripts they were copying. So, what kinds of manuscripts might routinely have been created in the early modern theatre and what would be their relationship to the script as first written by the author and as first performed by the company? To explore this, we must turn to the Folio plays for which there was a preceding quarto edition.

### Folio Plays Previously Printed in Quarto

Of the thirty-six plays in the Folio, sixteen had previously been published (often more than once) in quarto format, abbreviated here to Q followed by a sequence number and the date of publication:

- The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Q1 1602, Q2 1619)  
*Much Ado About Nothing* (Q 1600)  
*Love's Labour's Lost* (Q1 1598)  
*A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Q1 1600, Q2 1619)  
*The Merchant of Venice* (Q1 1600, Q2 1619)  
*Richard II* (Q1 1597, Q2 1598, Q3 1598, Q4 1608, Q5 1615)  
*1 Henry IV* (Q1 1598, Q2 1598, Q3 1599, Q4 1604, Q5 1608, Q6 1613,  
 Q7 1622)  
*2 Henry IV* (Q 1600)  
*Henry V* (Q1 1600, Q2 1602, Q3 1619)  
*Richard III* (Q1 1597, Q2 1598, Q3 1602, Q4 1605, Q5 1612, Q6 1622)  
*Troilus and Cressida* (Q 1609)  
*Titus Andronicus* (Q1 1594, Q2 1600, Q3 1611)  
*Romeo and Juliet* (Q1 1597, Q2 1599, Q3 1609)  
*Hamlet* (Q1 1603, Q2 1604–5, Q3 1611, Q4 1623)  
*King Lear* (Q1 1608, Q2 1619)  
*Othello* (Q1 1622)

We can see that Shakespeare's most successful plays in print before the Folio were history plays, three of them running to five or more editions in the quarter-century since their composition. Shakespeare was a highly successful author in print before the Folio appeared. As we have seen, for a further four Folio plays – *The Taming of the Shrew*, *King John*, *2 Henry VI* and *3 Henry VI* – there had been pre-Folio publication of a play somewhat similar in title and/or plot and/or language, but scholars do not agree on the relationship between these early editions (all printed in the 1590s) and their Folio counterparts.

Heminge and Condell in their preliminaries draw a sharp distinction between the pre-Folio quarto editions, which they characterise as stolen

and surreptitious editions made by frauds and stealths, and the versions of those same plays offered in the Folio. But when scholars in the late nineteenth century started closely to compare the quartos with the Folio, they found clear evidence that in some cases the Folio was itself printed directly from the quarto and in others, where it was not, the quarto is nonetheless demonstrably the better edition.<sup>7</sup> When we say that the Folio script of a play was printed ‘from’ a preceding quarto, we mean that the compositors setting type for the Folio held in their hands and were using as their copy not a manuscript of the play but a printed quarto. We can tell this happened where the Folio blindly reproduces from the quartos errors that could not have been made independently of them.

Far from the Folio offering readers the plays ‘cur’d, and perfect of their limbes’, it was in fact for at least some of them just reprinting the quartos that Heminge and Condell characterised as stolen and surreptitious, and for others it offered scripts inferior to the preceding quartos. The editors of the 1863–6 Cambridge–Macmillan Complete Works edition summarised the consequences of this for the reliability of the Folio: ‘The truth seems to be that it is of very varied excellence, differing from time to time according to the state of the MS. from which it was printed, the skill of the compositor, and the diligence of the corrector.’<sup>8</sup> The only serious readers still labouring under the misapprehension that the Folio is the best edition for every play are theatrical practitioners. This misapprehension has recently been reinforced by the Royal Shakespeare Company, which has commissioned a Complete Works edition based on the Folio because for each play it is ‘the version of Shakespeare’s text preferred by many actors and directors’, implying that the preference is justified rather than mistaken.<sup>9</sup>

The 1863–6 Cambridge–Macmillan editors’ collation of the pre-Folio quartos with the Folio seemed to show that Heminge and Condell were lying when they claimed that the quartos were ‘stolne, and surreptitious copies, maimed, and deformed by the frauds and stealthes of iniurious impostors’ and that the Folio was free of these taints. But what if Heminge and Condell were referring only to the worst of the pre-Folio quartos and not the good ones that the Folio reprinted? This was the influential argument of A.W. Pollard, who divided the quartos into good ones printed from reliable manuscripts, perhaps even Shakespeare’s own, and bad quartos illicitly put together by unscrupulous publishers, or pirates as he later called them.<sup>10</sup> The bad quartos were unreliable scripts, created by minor actors who managed to pull together, wholly or partly from memory, some semblances of the plays in which they had performed. Pollard counted as bad quartos: *Romeo and Juliet* Q1 (1597), *Henry V* Q1 (1600), *The Merry Wives of Windsor* Q1 (1602), *Hamlet* Q1 (1603) – all four of which were subsequently reprinted

from much better manuscript copy – and a play that did not appear in the Folio, *Pericles* Q1 (1609). None of these bad quartos was reprinted in the Folio.

Pollard's distinction of good and bad quartos dominated thinking about the textual problems of Shakespeare throughout the twentieth century, and gave hope that the remaining early editions, the good quartos and the Folio, are tolerably accurate records of his plays. The resulting theory of New Bibliography instilled editorial confidence that we can recover from the early editions what Shakespeare actually wrote.<sup>11</sup> As we have seen, for twenty plays in the Folio there is no preceding quarto, so the Folio is our only authority and must be relied upon for modern editions. For the rest, editors could compare the quarto and Folio editions to determine whether the Folio simply reprints a quarto or is based on a manuscript with its own independent authority. If the Folio merely reprints a preceding quarto, an editor would base the modern edition on that quarto, although if that quarto was itself merely a reprint of a still-earlier one the editor would trace the line of transmission back to the source and use that. If the Folio edition is based on an independent manuscript rather than an available earlier quarto, the task would be to determine which was the more authoritative of the two by trying to reconstruct the transmission of the play through its early manuscript and print incarnations.

To reconstruct the transmission of a play, editors had to make generalisations about the kinds of manuscripts that were routinely created in the early modern theatre and the features they would have. Obviously, for each play there must at some point have existed the first complete manuscript in the author's (or the authors') own handwriting, and in New Bibliography these were called the foul papers, since they were likely to contain the considerable crossings-out and rewritings that characterise first drafts. If the author or someone else copied out the foul papers to make a more tidy manuscript, this was called a fair copy. At some point there had to exist one or more manuscripts of the play that were used in the theatre for various practical purposes such as copying out the individual actors' parts – all the lines for one character – from which the actors learnt their speeches. Because paper was expensive and hand-copying was slow, actors were given manuscripts containing only their own lines and their cues for when to start speaking. Tiffany Stern has explored how this constraint affected early modern drama.<sup>12</sup> There had also to exist one or more manuscripts for the purposes of casting and procuring properties for the play, sending the script to the Master of the Revels for performance licensing<sup>13</sup> and providing a definitive script to be consulted backstage during a performance to make sure everything was running smoothly. Most New Bibliographers assumed

that playing companies feared the proliferation of copies of the script because it risked one falling into the hands of a rival playing company or a publisher. They supposed that ‘for most plays, probably only two manuscripts ever existed’, the author’s foul papers and a fair copy marked up with additional notes to be consulted before and during a performance, known later as the promptbook.<sup>14</sup>

New Bibliographers were clear on the features they thought would characterise the author’s foul papers and the promptbook, although (with one minor exception) in Shakespeare’s case no such manuscripts survive. In the author’s foul papers they expected to see the writer in the heat of composition failing to be consistent about such things as persons’ names and perhaps thinking in relational terms so that the same character might have speech prefixes as *Fa[ther]* in scenes when he is talking to his son and as *Lo[rd]* when talking to his servants or his monarch. Also, in foul papers the New Bibliographers would expect to see only the minimum necessary stage directions, so that additional calls for incidental music such as a flourish of trumpets every time a monarch enters the stage would be absent. Stage directions in foul papers might be erroneous and/or tentative rather than precise, calling for the entrance of ‘*three or four attendants*’ and leaving it to rehearsals to settle exactly how many were needed. In a promptbook, the New Bibliographers reckoned, all these things would have to be clarified, corrected and regularised, having been added to a fair copy of the script during preparations for performance, including rehearsals. If during those preparations a practical necessity was discovered that the author had neglected, the promptbook would be altered to provide the necessary solution.

In the second half of the twentieth century, textual scholars examined closely each of the quartos and the Folio to determine for each play whether it was printed from an existing edition or, if printed from a manuscript, whether that manuscript was the author’s foul papers or a promptbook, judging from the characteristics just described. In essence, they were looking for problems solved in preparations for the first performance and early performances. For example, in Q1 *Richard II* the end of the first scene and the beginning of the second look like this:

[KING]

Lord Marshall, commaund our Officers at Armes,  
Be readie to direct these home allarmes      *Exit*

*Enter Iohn of Gaunt with the Duchesse of Glocester.*

GAUNT. Alas the part I had in Woodstocke’s bloud,  
Doth more sollicite me then your exclames,<sup>15</sup>



Since the *Exit* at the end of the first scene is the only one in that scene, it must be a general exit for all the characters, more properly written as the plural *Exeunt*. This means that John of Gaunt, who speaks in the first scene, must leave with the King at the end of that scene and immediately re-enter with the Duchess of Gloucester at the start of the second scene. Characters are not supposed to do this as it violates the so-called Law of Re-Entry and is liable to confuse the audience: a new scene should start with new people. The Folio seems to solve this problem by giving Gaunt his own exit ten lines before the end of the first scene:

[BOLINGBROKE]

Where shame doth harbour, euen in *Mowbrayes* face

*Exit Gaunt.*

KING. We were not borne to sue, but to command,  
Which since we cannot do to make you friends,

...

Lord Marshall, command our Officers at Armes,  
Be readie to direct these home Alarmes. *Exeunt.*

*Enter Gaunt, and Dutchesse of Gloucester.*

GAUNT. Alas, the part I had in Glousters blood,  
Doth more solicite me then your exclames, (b6<sup>v</sup>)

There is nothing in the dialogue to motivate Gaunt's exit ten lines before everybody else at the end of the first scene. He slips away so he can enter at the start of the next scene without violating the Law of Re-Entry. This looks like an alteration made during rehearsal to solve a practical problem, suggesting that the quarto was printed from a pre-rehearsal version of the play (as foul papers are) and the Folio from a post-rehearsal version (as a promptbook is). This hypothesis is consistent with the general departure at the end of the first scene being more correctly marked with the plural *Exeunt* in the Folio in place of the quarto's singular *Exit*.

Such illustrations of the Folio apparently reflecting correction of the script in rehearsal can be multiplied many times and one more must stand for many. In the middle of *Much Ado About Nothing* 2.1, Benedick is left alone by Claudio and reflects upon the latest insult served him by Beatrice. After seven lines of such reflection, he is in Q1 joined on stage by a group of others: '*Enter the Prince, Hero, Leonato, Iohn and Borachio, and Conrade*'.<sup>16</sup> Oddly, however, the next sixty lines of dialogue involve only Benedick and the Prince: the other characters are not used and if they really do enter they must stand around for several minutes doing nothing. Q1's entrance is thus at odds with its dialogue, and this has led editors to suppose that the quarto

was printed from Shakespeare's foul papers, reflecting his first intentions. Shakespeare wrote the stage direction, they surmise, when planning to develop the scene using all these characters, but as he composed he found himself developing an extended conversation between just Benedick and the Prince and he failed to go back and adjust the entrance direction accordingly. New Bibliographers expected that a post-rehearsal script would show the necessary correction to the stage direction, and in the Folio they found it: instead of the mass entrance of six characters the Folio has '*Enter the Prince*' (I5<sup>r</sup>).

Was the Folio's *Much Ado About Nothing* printed, then, from a promptbook in which the theatrical impossibilities of the author's foul papers (used to print Q1) had been corrected? This tempting idea is scotched by clear evidence that for the most part the Folio simply reprints Q1. An obvious sign of this is the opening stage direction of the first scene, which in Q1 is '*Enter Leonato gouernor of Messina, Innogen his wife, Hero his daughter, and Beatrice his neece, with a messenger*'.<sup>17</sup> The error here is the inclusion of a wife for Leonato called Innogen who says and does nothing in the scene and is referred to by no one at any point in the play. She is mentioned again in the stage direction at the start of the second act – '*Enter Leonato, his brother, his wife . . .*'<sup>18</sup> – and then disappears from the play. The obvious inference is that in his foul papers, reflecting his original intentions, Shakespeare brought on Innogen because he was planning to use her, but as the scenes developed he found it was better for Leonato to have no wife and hence for Hero to have no mother to turn to. The Folio, however, also contains these obviously incorrect stage directions (I3<sup>r</sup>; I4<sup>v</sup>), so it cannot simply be based on a promptbook in which such problems had been sorted out by rehearsal. Rather, this Q1/Folio agreement-in-error proves that an exemplar of the quarto was used in the printshop to typeset the Folio.

But if Folio *Much Ado About Nothing* simply reprints Q1, how come it also has differences from Q1 – such as the refinement of the stage direction in the middle of 2.1 – that seem to reflect corrections made in rehearsal? One possible explanation is that the particular exemplar of Q1 used to typeset the Folio edition was first annotated by consultation of the promptbook to improve its stage directions. Where this was done assiduously, the quarto exemplar (and hence later the Folio) gained annotations providing theatrically correct stage directions (as in the middle of 2.1) and where it was done less carefully, where the annotator overlooked a difference between Q1 and the promptbook, the faulty quarto stage directions (and hence later the Folio stage directions) remained uncorrected.

This hypothesis of annotated quartos being used to print Folio plays received its fullest expression in the 1986–7 Oxford Complete Works,

where it was claimed for eleven of the sixteen plays for which there is a preceding quarto:

*Titus Andronicus* (based on Q<sub>3</sub>)  
*Love's Labour's Lost* (based on Q<sub>1</sub>)  
*A Midsummer Night's Dream* (based on Q<sub>2</sub>)  
*Romeo and Juliet* (based on Q<sub>3</sub>)  
*Richard II* (based on Q<sub>3</sub>)  
*The Merchant of Venice* (based on Q<sub>1</sub>)  
*1 Henry IV* (based on Q<sub>6</sub>)  
*Much Ado About Nothing* (based on Q)  
*Troilus and Cressida* (based on Q<sub>1</sub>)  
*Richard III* (based Q<sub>3</sub> and Q<sub>6</sub>)  
*King Lear* (based on Q<sub>2</sub>).<sup>19</sup>

Of course, the annotation of quarto copy might not in each case be extensive, so the additional authority that this process lent to the Folio varies from play to play. The remaining five plays – of the sixteen for which there existed a preceding quarto – were, according to the Oxford editors, printed in the Folio from a manuscript rather than a quarto:

*The Merry Wives of Windsor*  
*2 Henry IV*  
*Henry V*  
*Hamlet*  
*Othello*

For two of these, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Henry V*, the preceding editions were what Pollard called bad quartos, so naturally the Folio did not reprint those. For the other three – *2 Henry IV*, *Othello* and *Hamlet* – the Oxford editors thought that the Folio was printed from a scribal transcript of a document – probably a promptbook in the cases of *2 Henry IV* and *Hamlet*, probably not for *Othello* – containing a version of the play closer to performance than the foul papers upon which the preceding quartos were based.

What, then, is the consequence for modern readers of all these investigations into the provenance of the scripts in the Folio? For the twenty Folio-only plays it makes little difference since an editor's starting point has to be the Folio. For the plays that exist in quarto and Folio editions, however, the difference is substantial. For most of the twentieth century, editors assumed that where there was a choice to be made between basing a modern edition on an early edition printed from the author's foul papers or on one printed from, or influenced by, a promptbook, the obvious preference was for the former. Readers want, they supposed, to get as close as possible to the plays

as they existed in the mind of Shakespeare before he was forced to compromise with his fellow actors and accept the practical constraints of performance, including the limitations of casting from a small pool of actors. Necessarily, editors taking this view would correct faulty stage directions in the early quartos, and might use the Folio for this, but where the Folio has other substantial differences from the preceding quartos they would in general follow the quartos, thus preferring (they thought) editions derived from authorial foul papers over editions derived from the promptbooks.

The 1986–7 Oxford editors broke with this tradition by making the opposite assumption: that Shakespeare was a man of the theatre who welcomed and took part in the refinement of his plays that occurred by the collaborative process of preparation for performance, including rehearsal.<sup>20</sup> This refinement might involve the deletion of whole speeches and scenes if the result was a tighter and more artistically satisfying whole. Rather than trying to represent for modern readers the idea of the play as Shakespeare first conceived it and put it to paper, the Oxford Complete Works tried to represent how the play appeared when it was first performed. Complicating the implementation of this preference is the evidence that the quarto and Folio editions of a play might differ not only because of practicalities that emerged during preparation and rehearsal for first performance but also, and more substantially, because at some point after first composition Shakespeare thoroughly revised it. Figuring out just when such revision occurred is difficult. Taking all this into account, the Oxford editors based their editions of three plays – *Troilus and Cressida*, *Othello* and *Hamlet* – on the Folio even though there exist earlier quartos based on Shakespeare's own papers, and for *King Lear* they produced two editions, one based on the 1608 quarto and one on the Folio. For two other plays, *Titus Andronicus* and *Richard II*, the Oxford editors based their editions on the quartos but introduced lines from the Folio where they thought that these reflect additional matter found in the promptbooks of the first performances.

Thus, in the name of stage-centred editing, the 1986–7 Oxford Complete Works made more use of the Folio than preceding twentieth-century editions had. The assumption justifying this choice was that Shakespeare was thoroughly imbricated in the theatrical industry and culture of his day rather than being a lone author who handed over works to be debased in the theatre. This view of his working life was already orthodoxy across Shakespeare studies in the 1970s and 1980s when the Oxford Complete Works edition was being prepared, so we could say that the edition merely brought editorial practice into alignment with the latest thinking from theatre–historical and biographical scholarship. Where reviewers were hostile to the 1986–7 Oxford

Complete Works they were unable to raise principled objections to its approach and could only carp over minor choices of names for some plays (the edition favoured original stage names over later ones) and for some characters (the edition preferred pre- to post-censorship names). The edition's core principles are unassailable, so long as we accept that Shakespeare was a man of the theatre.

### Act Intervals and Censorship

Two changes in theatrical practice during Shakespeare's lifetime can be precisely dated and bear upon the character of the manuscripts from which the Folio plays were printed. One easily spotted difference between the preceding quartos and the Folio editions is that – with the exception of *Othello* (1622) – the quartos lack explicitly marked scene and act breaks and the Folio has them. The Folio is inconsistent about this: nineteen of its thirty-six plays are divided into scenes and acts and a further ten are divided into acts only. The quartos reflect what we would expect of Shakespeare's own papers, since the clearing of the stage by the exiting of all its characters is an unequivocal scene break needing no elaboration in a theatrical document. The act intervals are more complicated. Indoor hall playhouses such as the Blackfriars punctuated performances with four intervals (making five acts) because, aside from any aesthetic concerns, the candles used to light the theatre needed frequent attention. The open-air amphitheatres lit by daylight such as the Globe, on the other hand, performed plays without act intervals, at least until around 1609.<sup>21</sup>

From 1609 the Globe adopted act intervals in its performances, presumably because in August 1608 Shakespeare's company acquired the Blackfriars and wanted to regularise practices at the two houses.<sup>22</sup> Before this, Shakespeare wrote plays without act intervals and after it he wrote plays with them. None of Shakespeare's post-1609 plays was printed before the Folio appeared, so for those we have only the Folio to go on. But Shakespeare's pre-1609 plays were revived for performance after 1609 and presumably when this happened act intervals were written into the document(s) used to run performances. The only one of Shakespeare's pre-1609 plays that was first printed after 1609 and before the Folio was *Othello*, printed in 1622 in a quarto that marks the act intervals. Several of Shakespeare's pre-1609 plays that were already in print were printed again after 1609 and before 1623, but these did not acquire act intervals because the new editions merely reprinted the old ones.

The consistency and accuracy of act-interval markers in the Folio vary play by play according to the particular kind of copy the printer had in each case.

For some plays, intervals were mechanically imposed on scripts that were not written with intervals in mind. It is difficult to tell if this was done when the plays were revived after 1609 or in the printshop itself, although we would expect the theatre to make a reasonable job of such alterations. An egregious example is that the Folio has an unperformable act interval (dividing its Acts 3 and 4) in the middle of the battle of Agincourt in *Henry V* (i4<sup>v</sup>). At the other extreme, the stage direction ‘*They sleepe all the Act*’ (meaning all of the interval) between Acts 3 and 4 of Folio A *Midsummer Night’s Dream* (O1<sup>r</sup>), absent from the 1600 quarto, is a subtle adjustment presumably made in the theatre not the printshop.

Although they provide a convenient and familiar means for referring to particular parts of a play, act intervals are of little importance outside of scholarly studies because in today’s theatres – even the replica Globe in South London – plays are almost always performed in two rather than five parts. There may be artistic interest in how writing for four breaks shaped Shakespeare’s composition, but as Peter Holland remarks the resulting patterns may be invisible in performance and perhaps simply pleased Shakespeare as mental exercises.<sup>23</sup> Emrys Jones was right to identify the scene as the fundamental unit of Shakespearian dramatic composition.<sup>24</sup> For dating the composition and printing of some plays, however, the presence or absence of act intervals is valuable evidence. The Law of Re-Entry mentioned above in connection with *Richard II* is not violated if an act interval divides the two scenes, so in Shakespeare’s late play *The Tempest*, Prospero is at liberty to exit at the end of Act 4 and re-enter at the start of Act 5, as the Folio indicates.

The other historical event bearing on the provenance of the Folio scripts is a law passed in May 1606 to ‘Restrain Abuses of Players’. On pain of a £10 fine, actors were henceforth not to ‘jestingly or profanely speak or use the Holy Name of God, or of Christ Jesus, or of the Holy Ghost or of the Trinity’ in performance.<sup>25</sup> (Because it was censored by a different authority, the printing of drama was unaffected by this law.) The law covered not only newly written plays but also revivals of old ones, so as well as curtailing Shakespeare’s expression in plays he wrote after May 1606 it required alteration of his earlier ones when they re-entered the repertory. Thus Q2 *Henry IV* is unaffected because it was published before the law was passed, but the Folio edition is evidently based on a script that had been expurgated to conform to the new stipulations. Almost all the references to God in oaths, such as Falstaff’s ‘Fore God a likely fellow’,<sup>26</sup> said of conscript Peter Bullcalf, are replaced by milder words, as in ‘Trust me, a likely Fellow’ (gg1<sup>r</sup>). Because he is fond of strong oaths, Falstaff’s part suffers most from such censorship. Actors who favour the Folio here betray Shakespeare’s intention and present to audiences a Sir John who has been muzzled by Jacobean religious zealots.

Other Folio plays are affected to a lesser extent, with words such as 'sblood (God's blood) and *swounds* typically being softened. Examples are Bolingbroke's 'O God defend my soule' becoming 'Oh heauen defend my soule' (b6<sup>v</sup>) and Hamlet's 's'bloud do you think I am easier to be plaid on then a pipe'<sup>27</sup> becoming 'Why do you thinke, that I am easier to bee plaid on, then a Pipe?' (pp1<sup>r</sup>).

### Acting Versus Reading and the Nature of Theatrical Manuscripts

By the end of the twentieth century, the characterisation of Shakespeare as primarily a practical man of the theatre, not an author in the later sense of someone concerned about his readership, was well-established orthodoxy. There were dissenting voices, however. N.W. Bawcutt traced the evidence that some of Shakespeare's contemporaries and successors – Ben Jonson, John Webster, Barnabe Barnes and Richard Brome, and others – seem to have wanted their plays printed without the cuts made by the actors in preparations and rehearsal for performance.<sup>28</sup> As Bawcutt observed, the Folio certainly calls them 'his playes' and calls him their 'author', as does the title page ('Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies'), and it contains a big picture of the man and says almost nothing about the play's performance history. Around the same time, Richard Dutton wondered if the excessive length of some of Shakespeare's plays – too long to be performed without extensive cuts – suggests that he was writing to satisfy his growing readership.<sup>29</sup>

In the first years of the new millennium, Lukas Erne published a fully developed argument that Shakespeare was not only aware of his growing print readership but was positively cultivating it by writing material specifically for it.<sup>30</sup> As Erne rightly observed, around the end of the 1590s Shakespeare's name suddenly began to appear on his plays and by 1602 the greater part of all that he had written up to that point was in print. He was, moreover, canonised by Francis Meres in *Palladis Tamia* in 1598 and his works were much excerpted in Robert Allot's *England's Parnassus* (1600) and John Bodenham's *Bel-vedere, or the Garden of the Muses* (1600). Erne considered the bad quartos for which we have much longer good quarto or Folio counterparts – *Romeo and Juliet*, *Henry V* and *Hamlet* – and concluded that Shakespeare's scripts were routinely cut for performance and that in these pairings we get a sense of how much was lost. Depending on just what was the printer's copy for each play in the Folio, we should entertain the possibility that the longer ones contain writing that Shakespeare knew would never make it to the stage but which he thought might well please his growing print readership.

In the last decade of the twentieth century, another long-established consensus about Shakespeare – the New Bibliographical characterisation of authorial and theatrical manuscripts – began to break down.<sup>31</sup> The *coup de grâce* was delivered in a recent monograph by Paul Werstine which shows that much of what New Bibliographers claimed about theatrical manuscripts is simply untrue.<sup>32</sup> Most importantly, the binary categorisation of authorial foul papers and promptbook is invalid: the manuscripts do not divide up so neatly. Werstine surveys W.W. Greg's rigid taxonomy of documents and shows that it took considerable special pleading and the discounting of substantial quantities of intractable counter-evidence. The assumption that an author's papers were likely to contain contradictions, ambiguities and theatrical impossibilities that would be intolerable in a document used for reference during a performance is, Werstine shows, untenable. There are surviving documents that clearly were used in the theatre and yet they retain such contradictions, ambiguities and impossibilities.

If Werstine is right, we are not justified in drawing general conclusions about the nature of the underlying copy for quarto and Folio editions of the same play from such evidence as the moving of Gaunt's exit in *Richard II* 1.1 and the improvement of the stage directions in *Much Ado About Nothing* 2.1, used above as illustrations. For every type of feature that New Bibliography took as evidence pointing to one or other kind of underlying manuscript – the presence of actors' names in place of characters' names, the emphasising of scene breaks, the presence of Latinate divisions of the kind '*Fimus Actus*' and so on – Werstine has a countervailing example from a manuscript of a different kind. The difficulty, though, is knowing how much credence to give particular cases and deciding which (if any) of the surviving manuscripts are typical of their class and which are anomalous. Subjective judgement here enters Werstine's arguments as much as it entered Greg's and those of his followers. There are by Werstine's count just nineteen surviving manuscript playbooks from the period 1576 to 1624, which is probably about 2 per cent of the number that once existed. With 98 per cent of the evidence lost, we cannot assume that what remains is representative. Of all the clothing worn by Elizabethans, virtually nothing has survived but an abundance of highly valuable and easily recycled silk lace. If we assumed that these surviving pieces are typical of everyday Elizabethan wear we would be wildly mistaken. Like all historians, students of the early modern theatre must weigh each piece of evidence individually. For most of the twentieth century, students of Shakespeare's plays enjoyed a consensus, now lost, about how to do this. It remains to be seen if a new consensus will take its place.



## Notes

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