



“Looke backe, who list”: Reassessing the 1611 Folio Text of *Complaints*

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Historically, we are now at a safe distance from viewing *Complaints* or even *The Shepheardes Calender* as belonging to Spenser’s *Minor Poems*—relegated to a kind of eternal secondariness. The editorial practice of distinguished twentieth-century editions from Oxford to the *Variorum* has long been superseded by more student-friendly texts edited by Bill Oram and others for Yale, and Richard McCabe for Penguin, where the non-*Faerie Queene* verse is more neutrally presented as *The Shorter Poems*.¹ Not secondary, not less important, just less long. Nevertheless, even the “Shorter” designation has problems in amalgamating publications such as the miscellaneous *Complaints* (1591)

¹ See *The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser Vol I: The Minor Poems*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910); *The Works of Edmund Spenser: A Variorum Edition*. Vols 7 and 8: *The Minor Poems Part One*, ed. Edwin Greenlaw, Charles Grosvenor Osgood, Frederick Morgan Padelford, Ray Heffner (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1943); *The Minor Poems Part Two*, ed. Charles Grosvenor Osgood, Henry Gibbons Lotspeich, Dorothy E. Mason (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1947); *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. William A. Oram, Einar Bjorvand, Ronald Bond, Thomas H. Cain, Alexander Dunlop, Richard Schell (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); *The Shorter Poems*, ed. Richard A. McCabe (London: Penguin, 1999).

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alongside the love poetry of *Amoretti and Epithalamion* (1595); both the Yale and Penguin editions are invaluable for scholars yet rather indigestible for students in the sheer diversity they present in tomes of around eight hundred pages. The edition of *Complaints* we are editing for The Manchester Spenser aims to reinscribe a sense of the singularity of that book with its varied yet analogous contents, and the very different profile it gives for “the new Poet” with its mixture of laments, beast fables, translated sonnet sequences, and dangerous satires of court.² Part of this work has underlined to us the powerful consensus of previous editors in favor of the 1591 Quarto (Q) at the expense of the 1611 Folio (F) edition. This article looks again at the evidence of the 1611 text in the service of exploring the material conditions of Spenser beyond *The Faerie Queene* in the period just after his death, when his reputation was consolidated.

It is only natural to assume that an edition printed during an author’s lifetime (and whose printing the author might even have overseen himself) is by default the definitive text, and that we must be skeptical of any changes in later versions.³ But it would be wrong to assume that because Q was printed during Spenser’s lifetime its text is faultless and does not contain any elements that Ponsonby or Spenser would have wanted to change or correct if given the chance. To judge the quality of F’s text fairly, we consequently need to evaluate it by the three criteria that constitute a good (early modern) reprint:

1. Accuracy (i.e., identification and correction of errors vs. introduction of new errors).
2. Reader-friendliness (i.e., presenting the text in a way that allows contemporary—and potentially also modern—readers to access it more easily than the first edition).
3. Sensitivity to the text (i.e., evidence of an editor or proof-reader who is aware of the text’s meaning and of its poetic properties).

In this context, it is useful to consider the corrections of Q itself as a point of comparison. That surviving copies of Q contain various combinations of corrected and uncorrected

² “The Printer to the *Gentle Reader*,” in *Complaints Containing sundrie small Poemes of the Worlds Vanitie* (London: William Ponsonby, 1591), A2v.

³ For Spenser’s presence in London at the time of printing, see Andrew Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 265–88.

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gatherings suggests that proofreading happened during printing. During that proofreading process, some mistakes were caught, most of them typographical errors, such as “dearh” for “death” in *The Ruines of Time* (RT) 52 (probably caused by an r in the compartment for similar-looking t's in the print shop), “Melpomine” for “Melpomene” in *The Teares of the Muses* (TM) (probably caused by a compositor with limited knowledge of the classics using phonetic spelling), or “Vimnial” for “Viminal” (probably caused by misreading a manuscript written in secretary hand) and “hardie head” for “hardiehead” in *The Ruines of Rome* (RR) sonnets 4 and 11.⁴ In the case of these and all other Q corrections referenced in this article, it is possible to tell from the presence or absence of unambiguous errors in the respective gathering which is the corrected version: “Melpomine” appears in the version of gathering E that also has TM 47 beginning “Gan grieffe then enter...” (the other version reads “Can,” which editors as well as F unanimously agree is the correct reading), while “hardie head” appears in gathering R, the same as “Vimnial,” which is evidently the result of a compositor misinterpreting the seven minims of “Viminal.”⁵

Other changes strike us as more significant—and possibly even authorial—in nature. These include the insertion of the participle “neighing” in *Mother Hubberds Tale* (MHT) 654 to complete the line,⁶ the changing of the phrase “did slily frame” at the end of *Muiopotmos* (Muio) 370 to “framde craftilie” so it fits the rhyme scheme, or the spelling change from “scatter” to “scater” in the final line of RR sonnet 30, resulting in an improved visual rhyme with “gather.”⁷ Still other corrections made during the printing of Q strike us as more trivial because they involve changes that might be put down to the individual preferences of a particular compositor. These are mostly changes to punctuation, such as the addition of a comma after “Linus” in RT 333 (arguably not a vital change, although the comma has a rhetorical function, so the line is improved by its presence) or the change of “down” to “downe” in VB sonnet 9 (both of which were

⁴ See *Variorum* 8, 682–84, for a full listing of variants between copies of Q.

⁵ In most secretary hands, letters consisting only of minims can be hard to tell apart, especially since not all writers reliably dotted their i's, so the word “rimes” can potentially look identical to “runes.” The only way to read words containing combinations of the letters i, u, m, and n is to count the number of minims (one for an i, two for a u or n, three for an m) and to consider the context, which can be challenging if the minim-heavy word happens to be a proper noun unfamiliar to the reader.

⁶ Cf. also the addition of the adjective “Dull” at the beginning of Muio 196 for the same purpose.

⁷ The version of gathering S containing the spelling “scatter” also has “dimned world” in RR sonnet 20 (corrected to “dimmed world” in the corrected version of the gathering) and the uncommon spelling “yeolow” in sonnet 30 (corrected to “yellow,” the spelling also used in *The Visions of Bellay* (VB) sonnet 12).

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standard spellings and used interchangeably in 1591).⁸ Other changes were not caught by the proofreader of Q, however, and persisted even into the corrected versions. These include the clearly accidental spelling “bee” at the end of *TM* 566 (quietly regularized to “bee” in all modern editions), “*Mansolus*” in *RT* 414 and *RR* sonnet 2, “Speheards” (for “Shepheards”) in *Virgils Gnat (VG)* 233, or the irregular italicizing of “*Abyesse*,” “*Faunes*,” and “*Satyres*” in *TM* 260 and 268. The latter are preserved by modern editions, although those words are not being used as proper nouns in *TM*, so this is what an early modern compositor would have considered a formatting error.⁹

Evaluating F’s accuracy essentially amounts to considering two questions: how well F is able to identify and correct errors in Q, and how many of F’s changes to Q’s text introduce actual errors as opposed to merely minor differences that we might consider unnecessary. Regarding the former question, F identifies and corrects a number of demonstrable errors. For example, it removes the clearly erroneous triple vowel in *TM* 566, turns the “Speheards” into “Shepheards” again, corrects “*Mansolus*” to “MAVSOLVS”, and sets “Abyesse,” “Faunes,” and “Satyres” in roman type. It also corrects Q’s “couertize” to “couetize” and “words” to “worlds” in *RT* 363 and 574, and amends Q’s “louing tongue” in *TM* 600 to a more intuitive (and likely correct) “liuing tongue,” and “stalkes” in *RR* sonnet 30 to “stackes” (also likely to be correct given its context). Other corrections have been viewed more skeptically. For example, F’s correction of “singulfs” in *TM* 232 to “singults” is often regarded as an unnecessary regularization—although it is a logical correction, considering that Spenser appears to have been the only author to use this variant of “singult” (which suggests he used the form erroneously).¹⁰ Despite those exceptions, however, the fact that modern editions typically adopt the majority of F’s corrections is a testimony to the edition’s accuracy. By contrast, F appears to introduce no changes that demonstrably create textual errors, although the presence of some Q

⁸ Most spelling corrections in Q are clearly intended to create or enhance visual rhymes (which are particularly frequent in *Complaints*); “downe,” which appears in the same line as a modified rhyme, is among the changes that seem more arbitrary.

⁹ Sixteenth-century texts are remarkably consistent in reserving italic type within a main text set in roman type only for proper nouns (and occasionally phrases in foreign languages). In cases where there is some ambiguity, however (such as in *TM*), compositors sometimes made the wrong call. Joseph Moxon’s *Doctrine of Handyworks* (London: Joseph Moxon, 1677) was published during a time when italics were increasingly used for emphasis, although the first piece of advice regarding a compositor’s use of italics still refers to “proper Names of Persons or Places” (225).

¹⁰ The exception is De Selincourt’s edition, which treats “singulfs” as a misspelling. “Singult” (derived from Latin “*singultus*,” meaning sob or hiccup) is a very rare word. Between 1590 and 1596, the form “singulf(e)s” appeared four times in three different works by Spenser (arguably four if the 1596 *Faerie Queene* is counted as a separate text). By contrast, none of his works contain the form “singults,” nor does the Early English Books Online/Text Creation Partnership (EEBO-TCP) corpus contain any instances of “singulfs” in the works of other authors. For the other uses of “singulf(e)s,” see *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* (1595) 168, and *FQ* III.xi.12 and V.vi.13.

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errors, such as “displacing” (for “dispadding”) and “Enfested” (for “Enfestred”) in *Muio* 250 and 354 suggest it was set from a copy of Q that contained some uncorrected gatherings.

The relative reader-friendliness of F compared to Q is best assessed by considering the intuitiveness of the punctuation of F. Q’s punctuation is relatively sparse and, as a result, some lines in *Complaints* are not immediately self-explanatory and may require readers to reread them and consider their context to understand them fully. Examples include *RT* 676–7, a couplet that in Q’s original punctuation reads: “Giue leaue to him that lou’d thee to lament / His losse, by lacke of thee to heauen hent,”. In context the speaker is addressing the “Immortall spirit of *Philisides*,” so the meaning of the lines can be roughly paraphrased as “permit one who loved you to lament the fact he has lost you, now that you have been taken to heaven”—but that meaning is far from obvious at a first reading because of the enjambment and the less-than-straightforward syntax. Without additional punctuation, readers may initially interpret “lament” as an intransitive verb and consequently misread the first line of the couplet as “permit one who loved to mourn for you [to do something that will be specified in the next line],” which in turn creates further problems when parsing the second line, because failure to spot the enjambment will make “His losse” appear to be the subject of the next clause (i.e., that which is being “hent” to heaven).¹¹ The person who prepared F for print evidently recognized the problem, because F adds punctuation that, while perhaps not fully grammatical, enables readers to read out the lines in a manner that will make their meaning clearer: “Giue leaue to him that lou’d thee, to lament / His losse by lacke of thee, to heauen hent,”. Placing a comma after each “thee” encourages readers to pause briefly, which allows them to chunk together the correct combination of words in the first line (i.e., “him that lou’d thee,” not “thee to lament”) and to recognize the implied relative clause in the second line (i.e., “thee [that art] to heauen hent”). As a result, F’s punctuation of these lines is clearly superior to Q’s in resolving an ambiguity that can hardly be regarded as intentional and enabling even modern readers to understand the lines more easily.

While this level of ambiguity is admittedly rare, there are numerous instances in which the combination of Q’s minimalist approach to punctuation and Spenser’s approach to syntax can cause readers to stumble during a first reading. Additionally, some

¹¹ Cf. meanings 1 and 2 of “lament, v.” in *OED* (transitive vs intransitive use). *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “lament, v., senses 1 and 2”, July 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/5372915346>.

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of the punctuation in Q is counterintuitive and likely erroneous. Modern editions typically respond by lightly adjusting and modernizing the punctuation in order to facilitate understanding. In a number of cases, this effectively restores the punctuation of F, such as in *RT* 497. In Q, this line ends with a comma, whereas F corrects this to a full stop. In context, *RT* 497 concludes not just a stanza but the first stanza of the first “tragicke Pageant,” which like all of the other pageants is divided into two parts.¹² The first stanza establishes the splendor that subsequently falls into decay in the second stanza, so F’s full stop is far more intuitive than Q’s comma; indeed, this is the only stanza in the whole Q text to end with a comma rather than a full stop. This suggests Q’s comma is likely to have been accidental. Punctuation marks are small, so compositors could easily confuse commas and full stops or semicolons and colons. With the exception of Renwick’s 1928 edition (whose text is effectively a facsimile of Q), all modern editors opt for a full stop.¹³

F’s approach is generally closer to the principles of rhetorical punctuation, in which commas, semicolons, and colons do not merely follow grammatical necessity but indicate where, and for how long, the reader should pause. As a result, F’s punctuation occasionally seems excessive compared to modern conventions, but it is in fact significantly more helpful than Q’s punctuation for reading Spenser’s poetry aloud, which is how most of his contemporaries are likely to have read it. F not only allows readers to distinguish between minor and major caesuras (an aspect that is particularly central in *TM*, a poem that revolves around the concept of subtle, nuanced variation on a familiar theme) but also to follow the meaning of syntactically complex lines of verse. However, there are moments where even such a perceptive reader as the person responsible for F’s punctuation changes meets his limits. In Q’s version, *RT* 214, which describes Leicester being slandered after his death, reads: “And euill men now dead, his deeds vpbraid:”. The reference of the phrase “now dead” may not be fully clear to a reader at a first glance, so the line could easily be misread as “and evil men, who are now dead, blame him for his deeds,” rather than “and, now that he is dead, evil men blame him for his deeds,” which is the intended meaning. F attempts to tackle the ambiguity by adding a set of brackets, turning the line into “And euill men (now dead) his deedes vpbraid:”. Grammatically, F’s

¹² The pageants are formally different from the rest of *RT* in carrying the C-rhyme of the first stanza over as the first rhyme of the second stanza, thus rendering each vision a quasi-rhyme royal sonnet rhyming *AbabbccCdcddde*.

¹³ *Complaints*, ed. W. R. Renwick (London: Scholartis, 1928).

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brackets only serve to make matters worse in seeming to identify the evil men as the ones who are now dead—which is of course nonsensical, because they can hardly be blaming Leicester from beyond the grave. In rhetorical terms, however, F’s brackets are a (modest) improvement over Q’s comma, because they flag up “now dead” as a parenthesis and allow readers reading out the line to pause at the right moments, and hopefully to recognize in the process that “now dead” in fact refers back all the way to the first line of the stanza (211), which is identical in Q and F and runs, “He now is dead, and all is with him dead.”¹⁴

F’s reader-friendly rhetorical punctuation is not always strictly necessary in grammatical terms, but it is worth noting that it is only rarely inferior to that of Q in terms of clarity. Another noticeable feature is that such punctuation is mostly clustered during *RT*, *TM* and, to a lesser extent, *VG*. The poems in the second half of F, which lacks *MHT*, feature significantly fewer punctuation changes.¹⁵ This uneven spread of punctuation changes may be an indication that they were not spontaneous decisions of a compositor but corrections contained in a marked-up copy of Q that F was set from—perhaps even a copy marked up by Spenser that had come to Lownes via Ponsonby’s papers, as has been posited by Andrew Zurcher in relation to the 1609 *Faerie Queene*.¹⁶ But even if that copy of Q was marked up by someone other than Spenser, that someone was not only a stickler for rhetorical punctuation but also—unlike the majority of the early readers who copied the poems from Q into their miscellanies and sometimes made nonsensical changes to lines—a perceptive reader with a sound understanding of Spenser’s poetry.¹⁷ Historically,

¹⁴ Another example of F’s punctuation improving the text in rhetorical terms but not necessarily making the meaning immediately clear is *VG* 308, in which Q has the shepherd striking the serpent, “Whereas his temples did his creast front-tyre,” i.e., “where its temples met its crested forehead” (cf. *OED* “whereas, adv. and conj.,” meaning 1 and “tire, v.3”, meaning 2. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “whereas, adv. & conj., sense 1”, July 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1509080120>, and *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “tire, v.3, sense 2”, July 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/6005023471>). The corresponding passage in *Culex* (197) reads “cingunt qua tempora cristam.” F attempts to clarify by moving Q’s nonsensical hyphen and changing the phrase to “did his creast-front tyre,” which may not succeed in making the meaning immediately obvious to readers but at least allows them to place the stress in the correct place and alerts them to the fact that they are dealing with a “creast front” rather than a “front tyre” (which would be a rather unexpected accessory in a snake).

¹⁵ Lownes omitted *MHT* from his 1611 version of *Complaints*, presumably for fear of offending Burghley’s son, Robert Cecil. See Bruce Danner, *Edmund Spenser’s War on Lord Burghley* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 163, for the suppression of a reprint of *MHT* until after Cecil’s death. There are only 14 lines containing punctuation changes to the verse of *Muio* (440 lines) and 28 in *RR* (462 lines) compared to 67 lines featuring changed punctuation in *TM* (600 lines) and 73 in *RT* (686 lines).

¹⁶ Andrew Zurcher, “The printing of the *Cantos of Mutabilitie* in 1609,” in *Celebrating Mutabilitie: Essays on Edmund Spenser’s Mutabilitie Cantos*, ed. Jane Grogan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 40–60, especially 40–44.

¹⁷ For the folio version of *MHT* (published separately in 1612), the situation is different, suggesting it was probably typeset from a different copy of Q with notes by a different, less perceptive, annotator. While this version of *MHT* is essentially accurate and corrects one of the most obvious errors in Q—the missing “at” in 648—as well as correctly identifying Q’s “Couge” for “Conge” in 1108 as a typographical error, it introduces more errors than it corrects: in 451, priests now used to say their service “at noone and euen” (instead of Q’s “morne and euen,” which echoes a phrase from the preface to the 1552 Book of Common Prayer), in 1190, the men of arms are “streightned” rather than “streigned,” and Mercury’s reaction to the evidence of the ape’s misrule in 1304 (“Whereas he saw, that sorely grieu’d his hart”), complicated by the elided relative pronoun, is made less clear by the introduction of an ungrammatical set of brackets: “Whereas he (saw that sorely grieu’d his hart).” The folio version of *MHT* also shows no clear intention to improve visual rhymes or maintain the distinction between monosyllabic “wings” / “worlds” and disyllabic “winges” / “worldes.” So while it improves some visual rhymes of the Q text (for example by changing an i to a

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F has been criticized for its attempts to “regularize” Q by adjusting some of its more eccentric spellings (given that early modern spelling is fluid but far less arbitrary than modern readers are inclined to think, this criticism is probably unreasonable) and to improve the flow of the verse by trying to avoid metrical irregularities (which is a more controversial matter).¹⁸ What has been overlooked in the “regularization” debate, however, is the fact that at least in the case of *Complaints*, F is highly sensitive to the poetic properties as well as the content of Spenser’s verse, which is particularly apparent in cases where changes affect the meter of a line.

Q contains a number of lines that require metaplastic manipulation in order to become iambic. In some cases, readers are merely required to distinguish between a monosyllabic and a disyllabic version of the same word, some of which Q indicates through differences in spelling, such as “worlds” / “worldes” or “wings” / “winges” (and it is another indication of F’s perceptiveness that it notices and preserves this distinction).¹⁹ In other cases, such as “And efte in *Dolons* slye surprysall” in *VG* 536, even metaplasms will only go so far, because the line requires readers to stretch “surprysall” to four syllables (i.e., something like “surprys-y-all”), a solution made even less convincing by the fact that this happens to be the earliest known instance of “surprisal.” In F, the phrase reads “subtile surprisall,” arguably not an elegant solution, but unlike in Q’s version, all that is required to make the line metrical is a (subtile) shift of stress. At the same time, it preserves the content of the line (“subtile” can be used as a synonym for “sly”; see meaning 1a in *OED*),²⁰ as well as its alliteration, while preserving—and perhaps even enhancing—the interaction of sound patterns between the adjective and the noun in the original:

y, turning “rayne” / “twaine” to “raine” / “twaine” in 1023–4) roughly the same number of visual rhymes are destroyed through regularisations of spelling (such as “fixed is” / “purposis” in 771–2, which turns into “fixed is” / “purposes”). Similarly, “worlds ende” in 87 is amended to the more metrically consistent “worldes end,” but at the same time, “wings swift” in 773–4 is amended to “wings swift,” resulting in a more irregular line. Changes to the word order that arguably make lines scan better, such as “Wildly to wander thus” in 185 or “himselpe a daw will try” in 913 do not otherwise improve the reader-friendliness of the text or enhance it in poetic terms: the latter does not help to clarify the uncommon turn of phrase, while the former serves to tone down the alliterative sequence of “wildly... wander... worlds.”

¹⁸ For example, “pityouslie” in *TM* 532 (a spelling not recorded anywhere else in print) is changed to “pitiously,” the spelling also used in *Amoretti*. One possible explanation for “pityouslie” is a pun on the phrase “pity you us”; alternatively, it may simply have been the work of the same phonetic speller who was responsible for “*Melpomine*” and the “yellow”s that appear in *RT* 10, *RR* sonnet 30, and *VB* and are amended to the much more common spellings “yellowe” and “yellow” in F—and not unreasonably, considering *FQ* had used “yellow” throughout. As Anupam Basu and Joseph Loewenstein have rightly noted, however, the spelling patterns used in Spenser’s works are on the whole fairly typical for the period during which they were printed (“Spenser’s Spell,” *Spenser Studies* 33 (2019), 63–102), and much the same can be said for the Lownes folio. As a result, the majority of spelling differences between Q and F are simply cases in which one standard early modern spelling (such as “shee” / “bee”) has been replaced with another, equally standard, early modern spelling (“she” / “be”). Those differences are consequently as likely to be a reflection of the preferences of the compositors involved as they are to be a reflection of Spenser’s own spelling preferences—which, with the exception of visual rhymes (which F predominantly preserves), were perhaps not uncommon in the first place.

¹⁹ See for example *MHT* 87, 185, 308.

²⁰ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “subtile, adj. & n., sense 1.a.,” July 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/8052813919>.

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“subtile,” whose “i” is evidently meant to be sounded here, not only shares the vowel sounds of “surprisall” but also its final consonant, which almost turns it into an internal rhyme. In short, it is the sort of clever change that Spenser himself may have chosen to make had he wanted to rework the line (and considering the original line is hardly one of his best, it is not inconceivable that he might have wanted to). A similarly perceptive metrical adjustment happens in *Muio* 149, although this time it is perhaps not so much intended to resolve a metrical irregularity as an ambiguity of meaning. In Q, lines 147–50 read:

And with good speed began to take his flight:
Ouer the fields in his franke lustinesse,
And all the champion he soared light,
And all the country wide he did possesse,

While the proximity of “champion” to “fields” and “country” may indicate a pun on Clarion being a valorous fighter (cf. the description of his arming in *Muio* 56–104), the words refer to landscape features, so they also point towards “champion” in the sense of “champion” or “champaign,” i.e., a plain or expanse of open country, which is the primary sense here.²¹ F, seeing the need for clarification, adjusts the spelling and, apparently in an attempt to avoid the trisyllabic pronunciation that is a metrical possibility but not typically used by Spenser, adds a syllable to the line.²² Thus the line in F reads, “And all the champaine o’re he soared light.” While we may regard the added syllable as unnecessary and the simultaneous use of disyllabic and monosyllabic “over” in the same stanza as slightly inelegant, the symmetry created by F’s amended line is not dissimilar to circular structures that can be found in *FQ*—indeed, when the epic uses “champion” it is always disyllabic—so again, this is a type of adjustment that is in tune with Spenser’s verse, if not actually by him.

The quality of F raises the question whether editors of *Complaints* should perhaps not be quite so quick to dismiss the best-known textual difference between F and Q: the anti-Burghley passages of *RT*, the poem whose text F revises most carefully and most

²¹ Cf. “champion | champion, n. and adj.” and “champaign” in *OED*. Spenser uses the word in this sense in the first line of *RR* sonnet 31 and in *FQ* V.ii.15 (where it refers to the flat expanse of the “Ocean plaine”). Both times it is spelt “champion.” *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “champion | champion, n. & adj.,” July 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3824771993>, and *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “champaign, n. & adj.,” July 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/5762138406>.

²² Apart from *FQ* III.i.63 and the argument of the same canto, all of Spenser’s twenty-nine champions are disyllabic—as are his three champions (see note 21).

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perceptively. While those revisions have traditionally been read as the result of posthumous censorship done on the part of Lownes to avoid offending Burghley's son, Robert Cecil, the earl of Salisbury, at least two of those lines—the concluding couplet of the second anti-Burghley stanza (454–5)—could be regarded as metrically superior in F.²³ In Q, those lines read: “O let the man, of whom the Muse is scorned, / Nor aliue, nor dead be of the Muse adorned.” While it is grammatical, the second line of the couplet requires readers to elide its beginning to “Nor ‘liue, nor dead.” This is caused by the fact that the first line does not contain a negation, which means that the first “nor” in the second line is grammatically necessary and cannot simply be dropped for metrical reasons to enable the beginning of the line to read “aliue nor dead.” If F's only concern were to remove the reference to “the man” believed to be Burghley, the easiest way to censor the line would have been to simply replace it with “such men” or “those men,” that is, to repeat the generalizing strategy F uses to emend ll.447–48. What F does, however, is to bring the “not” that is only implied in Q's version through the double “nor” forward to the place where it most naturally belongs: after the main verb. As a result of this choice, F is then able to have the second line begin at “Aliue,” so that the resulting couplet reads: “O! let not those, of whom the Muse is scorned, / Aliue nor dead, be of the Muse adorned.” In addition to the rewording of the first line and the dropped “nor” in the second, F adjusts the punctuation of the couplet. The exclamation mark after “O” for a brief dramatic pause may have been due to the preference of a particular compositor (for which there is considerable evidence throughout F),²⁴ but the decision to move the comma is interesting because it means the comma shifts from highlighting the word “aliue” in Q to highlighting the word “dead” in F, which is arguably more in keeping with the content of the line, while also signaling more effectively to readers which words should be linked together.

To be sure, other considerations are necessary when editing a text as controversial as *RT*, so our text will include both Q and F passages to enable the reader to make a judgment as to which is preferred. We present those passages here so that readers of

²³ Note, however, that if censorship was the main aim of the changes, they did not have the intended effect, because readers continued to identify the relevant passages as referring to Burghley. Cf. the “Summary of the Life of Mr. Edmond Spenser,” published with the 1679 *Workes* (effectively a reprint of Lownes' folio edition), which, after retelling the anecdote in which the tight-fisted chancellor refused to pay out Spenser's royal pension because it was only “for a song,” quotes the “censored” version of *RT* 449–55 from Q as evidence of the poet's subsequent grudge against Burghley.

²⁴ For other examples of F's tendency to exclamation marks, see *RT* 22, 44; *TM* 112, 181; *VG* 121, 145; *RR* sonnets 3.12, 23.2; *Muio* 253; *Visions of the Worlds Vanitie* (*VWV*) sonnet 6.14; *VB* sonnet 2.12. It should be stressed that there are many more examples throughout F.

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Spenser Review can also have that sense:

1591 text (Q) (RT 442–56)

Those two be those two great calamities,
That long agoe did grieue the noble spright
Of *Salomon* with great indignities;
Who whilome was alieue the wisest wight.
But now his wisdom is disprooued quight:
For he that now welds all things at his will,
Scorns th' one and th' other in his deeper skill.

O grieue of griefes, ô gall of all good heartes,
To see that vertue should despised bee
Of him, that first was raisde for vertuous parts,
And now broad spreading like an aged tree,
Lets none shoot vp, that nigh him planted bee:
O let the man, of whom the Muse is scorned,
Nor alieue, nor dead be of the Muse adorned.

1611 text (F)

These two be those two great calamities,
That long agoe did grieue the noble spright
Of SALOMON, with great indignities;
Who whilome was alieue the wisest wight.
But now his wisdom is disprooued quight:
For, such as now haue most the World at will,
Scorne th' one and th' other in their deeper skill.

O grieue of griefes! ô gall of all good harts!
To see that vertue should despised bee
Of such as first were raisd for vertuous parts,
And now broad spreading, like an aged tree,
Lets none shoote vp, that nigh them planted bee:
O! let not those, of whom the Muse is scorned,
Alieue nor dead, be of the Muse adorned.

In context, the censored passage follows the praise of the recently deceased Walsingham as Meliboe, which adds a layer of complexity to the F rewriting. Where Q coordinates the praise of Walsingham as a patron of learning and (slightly surprisingly) of soldiers, with the miserliness of an unnamed, Burghley-like individual, F's attack is a more generalized assault on "such as now haue most the World at will." The same difficulty is visible in the second stanza where the pluralized skinflints sit rather uneasily with the image of such patrons as "*an aged tree*."²⁵ As we have suggested, however, the rewriting is neither crude nor unintelligent: iambic meters are made more regular, while the sense of exclusion from patronal systems is even more starkly articulated in the first stanza, and perhaps more directly anticipates the outburst of absent-patron-woe in the next poem in the collection, *TM*. We are no longer just talking about the faulty "will" of one mean Cecil, but a "World at will" of those uninterested in learning or indeed "men of armes" (RT 441). The critical force of the F text has arguably not fully been canvassed by modern Spenserians, even though ironically this is the version of the text Ben Jonson read with considerable attention.²⁶

Jonson is a good place to end this essay. In his copy of the 1617 Folio, in effect a

²⁵ Our emphasis.

²⁶ James A. Riddell and Stanley Stewart, *Jonson's Spenser: Evidence and Historical Criticism* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1995), 55, 64–72, 148–50. Jonson read the 1617 Folio, which is a reprint of 1611.

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straight reprint of 1611,²⁷ Jonson scribbled on the page containing the censored passage (H2) that “Salomon was grieved w<ith> this consideration,” a concern which Riddell and Stewart suggest underpins the Cary/Morison ode.²⁸ Jonson crouched over his copy of the Lownes Folio offers a powerful corrective to the editorial tradition which has slightly downplayed the authority of that text, and more broadly, to the idea that Spenser was predominantly the poet of *The Faerie Queene. Complaints* likely was devoured by younger poets keen to see the practice of satire in *MHT* and indeed *RT* (a point perhaps emphasized by the many manuscript copies of the poems which postdate Q).²⁹ This suggests yet again that the profile of Spenser as a stylistic and political conservative has been exaggerated to the detriment of how he was actually read during the early modern period. Our forthcoming edition of *Complaints* will situate the poems more thoroughly than has been the case up to this point both in Spenser’s reading and in how Spenser himself was read and imitated by his followers. “He became his admirers,” W. H. Auden wrote shortly after the death of W. B. Yeats in 1939, “he is scattered among a hundred cities / And wholly given over to unfamiliar affections.” Charting how *Complaints* was reread in the decades after the 1590s gives a renewed sense of Auden’s frosty yet generative truism, “The words of a dead man / Are modified in the guts of the living.”³⁰

²⁷ See Francis R. Johnson, *A Critical Bibliography of the Works of Edmund Spenser* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1933), 42–48.

²⁸ *Jonson’s Spenser* 58, 149.

²⁹ There are at least seven manuscripts known to contain substantial extracts or complete poems from *Complaints*. Of those, four are at the British Library—MS Harley 6910, which contains *MHT*, *TM*, *VG*, *Muio*, *RT*, *RR*, *VWV*, *VB*, and *VP* (in this order); MS Add. 68942 (*MHT*; this is the manuscript that was at one point privately owned by Alexander Grosart); MS Harley 677 (*MHT*); MS Add. 34064 (selected passages from *MHT* and *RT*, i.e., the episode containing clerical satire, plus what is effectively an attempt to turn *RT* into an English version of the “Stemmata Dudleiana” through selective copying). The remaining three are held at the Bodleian Library (MS Douce 280, containing *MHT*, *TM*, and *VP*), the Houghton Library (MS Eng 266; effectively a scribal facsimile of Q, containing *RT*, *TM*, *VG*, *MHT*, *RR*, *Muio*, and most of *VWV*), and the Beinecke Library (MS Osborn b65, containing part of *RT* (some pages are missing), *TM*, *VG*, and part of *MHT* (breaking off halfway through the clerical satire, after the final line on N2)). While those manuscripts vary in nature and in some cases suggest differing preferences on the part of the copyists, they can all be dated to the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. Some (most notably MS Eng 266) were demonstrably copied directly from Q, while others are likely to have been (and Harley 677 almost certainly was), copied from a manuscript source text. Since even the manuscripts copied from other manuscripts show signs of Q’s influence in the shape of peculiar spellings or textual errors that appear in the uncorrected version of certain gatherings, suggesting that they all ultimately hark back to Q rather than to an earlier manuscript version in circulation before 1591, Spenser editors have traditionally disregarded the seven manuscripts, except to point out textual variants they believed to be of interest. Our edition will be the first to consider these manuscripts not in terms of textual variants but in terms of what they reveal about some of Spenser’s earliest readers.

³⁰ W. H. Auden, “In Memory of W. B. Yeats,” in *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings 1927–1939*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), 241–42.