The Editor, The Artist, and the Early Texts of Shakespeare: Moving Forward By Looking Back

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In act 2 of *Merry Wives of Windsor*, Mistresses Page and Ford discover that they have both been separately and secretly presented with identical love letters from Falstaff. Amidst the comical discussion that ensues between the two ladies, Mistress Page suggests,

> I warrant he hath a thousand of these letters writ with blank space for different names—sure, more—and these are of the second edition. He will print them, out of doubt, for he cares not what he puts into the press, when he would put us two. (2.1.50-53)[1]

This is one of many jokes in Shakespeare's plays regarding type, printing, letters, and the like. It seems appropriate that plays containing such witticisms continue to be edited and adapted over the centuries. Currently, there is a seemingly endless marsh of published opinions on how to best edit Shakespeare's works. This already overwhelming expanse of information is compounded when we recognize that textual editors aren't the only ones emending the plays. Theatre artists are also editors. Contrarily, textual editors are unquestionably artists themselves. While each has certain advantages over the other, artists and textual editors ultimately face the identical task of rendering the text accessible to a contemporary, general audience while also making it fresh—illuminating something new. Given this suggestion, an overwhelming realization follows: that the sea of advice on acting, directing, and producing Shakespeare's plays can also be considered editorial advice—and vice versa.

This could make the problem of where to begin an editing process rather overwhelming but, fortunately, arguments have been made for both editors and artists alike to *return*, as it is often put, to the First Folio printing of Shakespeare's works when preparing a new production of either text or performance. Surely, if authorities from both of these related, yet decidedly separate, disciplines insist on consultation of the same source, there's something to it. I do not intend to argue here that the First Folio be used exclusively nor that it be considered definitive, but it is often the most accessible and complete single source where early texts are concerned. However, when seeking to make creative choices for a performance, or to do the detective work of a textual editor, the Quartos must be considered just as valid a source of enlightenment as the Folio. Leslie O'Dell, in *Shakespearean Scholarship for Students and Actors* suggests that "even the 'bad quartos' that scholars like to bar from inclusion on the grounds of inferiority (a subjective evaluation, of course) often contain vivid, striking, beautiful bits of pure theatricality. Have a look. If you like it, use it. You have as much justification for creating a hodgepodge from a variety of versions as the editors do."[2] Indeed, Hamlet's "How all occasions do inform against me" soliloquy is not included in the First Folio, but it is in Quarto 2,[3] and both stage productions and text editions have elected to include the speech. It is precisely this process of election that makes returning to the early texts so important. An editor or artist may choose to work purely from the Folio, or he may choose to cherry-pick from all available sources; and that choice begins a creative process sure to produce most interesting work.

The early texts require the most creativity and critical thinking from both editors and artists. Pages are generally larger, the typeface is unfamiliar, many older and variant spellings of words appear, and there are errors, inconsistencies, and omissions throughout all of the early printed copies. These features contribute to a different way of reading and experiencing the plays. For an editor, returning to an early text strips away the status quo decisions of centuries of scholars before him, and for an artist, it removes prescription and creates possibility.

While the editor and artist share a function, they each have advantages over the other at times. Editors, for example, are able

to offer clarifying notes to the reader. A director or actor, on the other hand, certainly cannot stop a performance to explain a classical allusion or antiquated word usage to the audience. The actor *is* at liberty, however, to take advantage of rhetorical devices in the text. An editor can point out exceptional use of rhetoric in a note, but it will hardly have the same effect on a reader that it will have on an audience listening to an actor speak it. In *Richard III*, for example, Lady Anne pours out a richly rhetorical speech in act 1 over the lately murdered King Henry's corpse. The alliteration and assonance in the speech align remarkably with the emotional transitions the character makes. In lines 8-16 she speaks,

> Be it lawful that I invocate thy ghost,
> To hear the lamentations of poor Anne,
> Wife to thy Edward, to thy slaughtered son,
> Stabbed by the selfsame hand that made these wounds.
> Lo, in these windows that let forth thy life,
> I pour the helpless balm of my poor eyes.
> O cursed be the hand that made these holes:
> Cursed the heart that had the heart to do it:
> Cursed the blood that let this blood from hence! (1.2.8-16)

In lines 10-11, there is a brief double "w" and then an overwhelming repetition of hissing "s" sounds. The "s" is then used less frequently, but regularly throughout the next three lines, reminding an audience of Anne's anger and verve even in the midst of the wailing assonance of the numerous open vowel sounds in lines 12-14. The vowels then give way to panting "h" and "th" sounds in lines 14-16, gaining stability in line 16 from the sturdy, repeated word "blood" as Anne gains momentum, eloquence, and strength to continue with her curse.

An actor or director can choose how heavily to emphasize various rhetorical devices, but they are effective tools available to the artist that don't assist the text editor at all. An actor, leaning heavily on Shakespeare's rhetoric, can easily make the text quite clear to a modern listener—and rhetoric is often lost in print, unless being read by a trained eye. Since, then, the artist is after an aural effect, it makes sense to work, whenever possible, from a vibrant text that can inform the sound and feeling of the words. Consultation of early texts can also protect the contemporary theatre artist from a terrible, stylistic trap. Some contemporary

productions lean a bit toward Realism, or even Naturalism. An important part of theatrical training, these "isms" have their place, of course, but not in the worlds of Shakespeare's plays. It is nearly impossible to perform Shakespeare naturalistically, however, if a company has been utilizing early texts. While the characters certainly experience genuine emotions and relationships, Shakespeare's language is muscular—larger than life, and the early texts communicate this visually to the artist. Language literally grows on the page with more letters, more space, more history, more pomp. This encourages the thinking and speaking of an artist to grow as well. This language, these texts are large. They need filling, and can influence the artist that way.

During the Seattle weekend intensive course with Dennis Krausnick of Shakespeare and Company in March 2011, several actors discovered entirely new relationships with their text after consulting the First Folio—some completely re-interpreting the reading of a speech they had previously performed. Without exception, the performances following the Folio review were more vibrant and involving than the initial, very strong performances seen earlier in the workshop. In *Secrets of Acting Shakespeare*, Patrick Tucker catalogues his experience working with both seasoned and novice actors utilizing the First Folio text to produce the plays mostly unrehearsed, with cue scripts, in a manner thought to be similar to the original approach used by Shakespeare's own acting troupe. Tucker declares, "In all cases, at every event, workshop, conference, and of course scene study I have worked on, the First Folio version always plays better. Not sometimes, not almost, but always performs better."[4]

It can also be helpful with pronunciation and emphasis at times, even in the case that it is a typographical error by the printer, or an old, outdated spelling, acknowledged universally by editors as antiquated. According to the Folio, in act 2, scene 1 of *Merry Wives of Windsor*, for example, Mistress Ford says "Nay, I'll ne'er beleeee that" (2.1.583).[5] For an editor preparing a print edition the word must obviously read "believe" instead of "beleeee." For an actor, however, reading the word "beleeee" will catch her eye, as it is different from the spelling she is used to, error or no. Perhaps the word warrants special emphasis. She may have never placed any particular weight on this word, and is now seeing it in

a different light. Also, there is an abundance of "ee" sound, even in the conventional word "believe" that may have gone previously unnoticed. Even these small discoveries may lead an actor to a more vibrant performance because something unusual presented itself.

I propose this old language not as a manual for either traditional Elizabethan or "better" pronunciation, but as a tool for the actor. Long spellings capital letters, and even errors spark creative thinking—and perhaps might even inform their interpretation of a line. The same can be said for metric discrepancies. For example, while recently re-working a Kate speech from act 3, scene 2 of *The Taming of the Shrew*, I took a look through the Folio, and found a fascinating metrical difference from the text I'd consulted some years earlier. While standing at the altar, waiting for a grossly tardy Petruchio to arrive, Baptista wonders,

> What will be said? What mockery will it be,
> To want the bridegroom when the priest attends
> To speak the ceremonial rites of marriage?
> What says Lucentio to this shame of ours? (3.2.4-7)

Kate erupts, "No shame but mine" (3.2.8), going on to disparage Petruchio's character and bemoan the injustice of her situation. Originally, working from the Oxford text, I had previously learned a section of this speech as follows:

> And to be noted for a merry man
> He'll woo a thousand, 'point the day of marriage,
> Make friends, invite them, and proclaim the banns,
> Yet never means to wed where he has wooed. (3.2.14-17)[6]

The new Royal Shakespeare Company edition I later consulted prints the third line of the above, "Make feasts, invite friends, and proclaim the banns."[7] The First Folio, however, is remarkably different. It reads, "Make friends inuite, and proclaime the banes."[8] The two editions I had learned the speech from earlier both make this line metrically regular, and rhythmically smooth. The line in the First Folio only has nine syllables and is decidedly choppy. This is a situation where the modern editions vary noticeably from the Folio. Even the RSC edition, whose aim is to be as true as possible to the First Folio,[9] emends this line, as mentioned above.

Additionally, the emendation chosen by the RSC editors seems further from the Folio text than that of the Oxford editors.

Stanley Wells suggests in his *Re-editing Shakespeare for the Modern Reader* that we would do well to give Shakespeare some leeway with revision-induced errors[10] when it comes to emending a discrepancy between texts, or in stage directions, that seems an oversight or obvious mistake. John C. Meagher, however, states in *Shakespeare's Shakespeare*, "that Shakespeare is almost always true in his fashion, even when inconsistent, and that inconsistency is for him a dramaturgical strategy, not a lapse. We need to learn the principles of Shakespearean dramaturgy, and that includes accepting his right to ignore our ideas about aesthetics."[11]

What do we do, then, with this line of Kate's? Modern editors have chosen to render it metrically regular. Further research shows that the version in the 1594 Quarto has different punctuation, but still only nine syllables. There isn't a marked difference between how the line is printed from one early text to another, so, in this case, the editor becomes a creative artist who has the ability to effect the way a practical theatre artist understands and interprets this speech. In the event that a director, actor, or dramaturg elects to utilize only modern editions to assemble their particular cutting of the play, the line will run regular and smooth. An artist who chooses to consult the Folio, however, will have a completely different experience of the line. With only nine syllables, it is halting, and the sense might be quite different. In the Norton facsimile of the First Folio, there is a dubious, nearly comma-shaped smudge which could either make the line "Make friends inuite, and proclaime the banes," or "Make friends, inuite, and proclaime the banes."[12] An editor must make a decision, print it, and either mention the metric differences in the footnotes or not. An artist, on the other hand, may take character clues from the rhythmic disturbance of a short line. Perhaps Kate's personal rhythm, being upset by this situation, caused a change in her, for example. If the actor is ambitious, she may look to see if Kate has any other irregular lines in her previous tirades and decide whether this is an emotional turning point for the character.

This choice illuminates another perceived separation between editor and artist: the idea that one is an interpreter and the other a creator. These are misguided stereotypes, indeed. Both disciplines

require creative thinking, and both involve large amounts of interpretive skill. The relationship an editor or artist has to time, however, is quite different. An artist's edition of a play has an expiration date. As soon as the run of a particular production has ended, it will never be seen again. Even the same production mounted again elsewhere will be somehow different. In this way, the artist can afford to take larger risks with the material, trusting that, if an interpretation isn't successful, they can try something new the next time—even as soon as the next night or the next week. Editors have a different relationship with time. While they often have more scholarly resources at their disposal, their choices exist much longer. A printed edition can last for centuries, placing great responsibility on the editing scholar to make choices that are fresh enough to warrant a new edition and sound enough to be lasting.

In the aforementioned March 2011 Shakespeare and Company Seattle workshop, Dennis Krausnick informed the participating group of actors that the more specific a choice they make with the language, the more universally understandable it will be to an audience. This applies to editors, as well. In situations like that mentioned above with Kate's speech, an editorial choice must be made. The more definite and bold a choice the editor makes, the more it will inform a reader's understanding of the text. It bears commenting, however, that the comprehension of a reader operates differently from that of an audience member. What an actor can make clear using inflection, emotion, or gesture, an editor must make clear with punctuation, word choice, and, perhaps, even minor metric emendations. Not to advocate a willy-nilly changing of Shakespeare's words as fancy dictates, but in those situations where several options exist that clarify, amend, or illuminate what was printed in an early text, an editor would do well to put everyone else's decisions aside, take a look at the early texts, and make his own creative, interpretive choice.

Besides, it's not at all uncommon for a company producing Shakespeare to employ a wild concept or change words in a minor way to suit it better. For example, when casting characters as women who were originally men, the form of address must be changed. Another notable instance of production-specific word alteration occurred in the prologue to *Henry V* in Michael Boyd's

recent production for the Royal Shakespeare Company: "Or may we cram within this wooden O" became "Or may we cram within this *rusty shed*."[13] This may seem heretical to some, but the set was, in fact, an arena of rusted metal, and the small change (not at all disruptive to the meter) drew the audience in dramatically. It made the play specific to that moment in time and place.

W.B. Worthen, in *Shakespeare and the Authority of Performance*, discusses the relationship between texts and works, and explores what it means to be Shakespearean, or whether any text or production can even claim to be authentically so. He explores the duality between texts and works, based on Roland Barthes's theory. In this model, works are the actual product of the author, touched by the author's own hand, and directly connected to him—an extension, an act of writing. A text is any reproduction of the work or, as Worthen suggests, any *production* of the work at all, printed or performed. He catalogues "three interlaced ways of thinking about a text: (1) as a canonical vehicle of authorial intention; (2) as an intertext, the field of textuality; (3) as a material object, the text in hand."[14]

Each new edition of a text seems to spark a new discussion of editing theory. For example, some editors, even now, are in favor of mending broken or sloppy meter, while some consider it an inauthentic manipulation of the playwright's words. Stanley Wells brings an interesting point when speculating which text is best for an editor to work from: "An editor must choose whether to print the passage as it stood in Shakespeare's manuscript before it was put into rehearsal, or to print it as it was acted by Shakespeare's company."[15] Truly, any discussion on editing Shakespeare ultimately stems from whether an editor wishes to get as close as possible to what Shakespeare actually wrote, or wishes to clean up the texts to reflect what Shakespeare *meant*, what Shakespeare revised after the play opened, or what will make sense to a modern reader.

Of Worthen's three ways of thinking about text, the first and third primarily contribute to editing debates. To think of a text as both "canonical," conjuring images of the spiritual and the divine, and "material," suggesting something common and accessible, seems contradictory. The plain truth, which is quite clear to theatre artists, is that contradiction often leads to brilliant creative solutions. Worthen notes that "to think of performance either

as transgressing the text or as a means of reproducing the text requires a certain confidence in the identity of the text itself."[16] In part because of the constant debate over whether Shakespeare actually penned his plays, the debate over what makes something authentically Shakespearean renders any editorial position at least a little shaky.

The mystery shrouding this entire canon of work should instill a feeling of liberation in the text editor. The artist rarely requires permission to liberate himself, and stage productions of Shakespeare can be, as in the case of Peter Brook's groundbreaking *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1970, just as influential as a printed edition. As Worthen boldly suggests, "reading and performance apply a variety of historically discrete, conventional, and changing practices to the text in their production of the work. No production speaks the text in an unmediated, or faithfully mediated, or unfaithfully mediated way. All productions betray the text, all texts betray the work."[17] This suggestion bravely and accurately notes that no matter what position a production, editor, reader, or scholar may take in a treatment of Shakespeare's text, it will still be an interpretation of the ambiguous, absent original work.

Why shouldn't the editor work from an inquisitive and creative position, then? In *The Shakespeare Wars*, a fascinating exploration of these very debates of authenticity, editing, and performance, Ron Rosenbaum states, "Even those who don't believe Shakespeare . . . wrote Shakespeare's works do believe there *is* something *distinctive* about the works, whether they were written by Bacon, Marlowe, or the Earl of Oxford. Even they believe that any significant part of the canon defines, or at least irrevocably colors, the interpretation of the rest."[18] If the works, regardless of their origin, are so distinctive, where does that distinction come from? Patrick Tucker feels that "to perform the Folio version, or even the Quarto version will get you closer to what the original intention may have been, but to work from a conflation of the two versions will almost certainly drown and miss vital theatrical messages."[19] While this statement is obviously meant for artists, there are editors who feel the same.

The new Royal Shakespeare Company edition of Shakespeare's plays attempts to emend the First Folio, without conflating, except

in the case of missing texts.[20] The Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor Oxford edition goes so far to print two different texts of *King Lear*, [21] as does the Norton,[22] which prints the two texts on facing pages to allow comparison. In a market full of conflated texts, the decisions of these editors were bold and exciting. Sometimes, it can be just as exciting for an editor to decide against emendation, and simply note what may or may not work in performance. In an effort to avoid following the status quo decisions in a particular case, Wells "prefer[red] not to make a change while noting the problem . . . perhaps because an edition can be annotated—one is more willing to confront a reader than a playgoer with nonsense."[23] To call it "nonsense" is a bit severe, but the sentiment is sound. A reader may need or want to know what other artists or editors have decided to do with a certain bit of text, if they find it cumbersome. A playgoer has the artist mediating who will, theoretically, have already made sense of the "nonsense."

Even artists who take the time to consult the First Folio or other early texts often have a modern edition they prefer to work from. Many drama schools and theatre companies also have preferred editions. On the list of supplies required for the 2008 Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts Summer School intensive, students were requested to bring either an Oxford or a Royal Shakespeare Company edition. Both of these editions seem to have consciously had the "purpose of playing" (*Hamlet* 3.2.14-15) in mind. The preface to the RSC edition goes so far as to detail the roles of its various editors and assistants in terms of theatrical employment: "This edition is the product of the Royal Shakespeare Company's principle of ensemble. Jonathan Bate's role has been akin to that of a theatre company's artistic director; . . . Eric Rasmussen has been like a stage director overseeing the performance of the complete works."[24] These editions both have a very practical feel to them, and are excellent as a starting point for theatrical work. Modern spelling editions make the text more accessible to the student, average reader, and even theatre artists. While it is advisable for artists dealing with Shakespeare to engage in scholarly pursuits, it isn't always done. As such, the creativity and scholarship of the editor affects the artist's edition onstage. The editor and artist are further linked in this way. An artist is often dependent on the work of an editor, though it is less often that an editor is dependent on the work of an artist.

Editors and artists may face the same ultimate goal, but the tools with which they communicate and the process of production are quite different. Editorial theory is informed by research and history—the biography of Shakespeare the man, his writing process, early performance reviews, and the typography and printing methods of the time. Performance theory, on the other hand, is concerned with communicating what is given—making quick and potent decisions and utilizing manipulation, interpretation, surrender, relationships, and connection. It is concerned with the immediate moment and the audience in front of it; with what *is*, rather than what *was*. To be most successful, however, actors and directors must be interested and practiced scholars, just as textual editors must be flexible, creative artists. The editors of the Royal Shakespeare Company edition beautifully and graciously articulate in the conclusion of their preface both the value of tradition and the need for bold, fresh choices: "We have always been conscious of standing on the shoulders of giants, while being aware that our predecessors will disagree with several of our key principles and hundreds of our local decisions. Such is the process of Shakespearean editing, which will continue so long as the plays are read and performed."[25]

The only true way forward for either Editor or Artist in further illuminating the works of Shakespeare lies in the early texts. Regardless of which text can be considered authoritative, there is certainly more authority the closer one gets to the date of authorship. Academia is nowhere near solving the great mystery of Shakespeare, and debate still rages over his identity and credibility; and, ultimately, it is difficult to make emendations based on the supposed intentions of a man who remains an enigma. Perhaps we should separate the mystery of who Shakespeare was—what his habits were—what kind of a man, writer, and artist he (or they) may have been, and simply look at what we have been left to work with.

Part of the timeless and rich nature of Shakespeare's work lies in its flexibility. The language of his time was fluid and unsystematized, the printing was unreliable, and the handwriting often puzzling. Additionally, the author of these plays, a mortal being, if a genius, made mistakes, forgot to edit at times, and likely left superfluous direction unwritten as he could explain it

to the company as they rehearsed. While the bulk of the canon is deliberate in its craftsmanship, these mysteries and blank spots invite vast creativity and provide illumination for those scholarly artists and artistic scholars who care to look for them.

Notes

1. Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen, ed., *The RSC Shakespeare, William Shakespeare Complete Works* (Hampshire, UK: Macmillan Publishers, Ltd., 2008). This is the modern edition of Shakespeare from which I take all of my quotes in this paper, unless otherwise noted. It is also the edition I prefer to work from as an actor.

2. Leslie O'Dell, S*hakespearean Scholarship: A Guide for Actors and Students* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), 52.

3. Bate and Rasmussen, R*SC Shakespeare*, *Hamlet*, introduction, 1923.

4. Patrick Tucker, *Secrets of Acting Shakespeare, The Original Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 225.

5. William Shakespeare, *The First Folio of Shakespeare, Norton Facsimile*, prep. Charlton Hinman (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1968).

6. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, ed., *The Oxford Shakespeare, The Complete Works, Second Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

7. Bate and Rasmussen, R*SC Shakespeare*.

8. Shakespeare, *First Folio, Norton*.

9. Bate and Rasmussen, R*SC Shakespeare*, introduction, 55.

10. Stanley Wells, *Re-editing Shakespeare for the Modern Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 80, 91-93. Wells actually brings up giving Shakespeare the benefit of the doubt on several occasions peppered throughout the book.

11. John C. Meagher, *Shakespeare's Shakespeare, How the Plays Were Made* (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1997), 37.

12. See note 5.

13. Royal Shakespeare Company, *Henry V*, Stratford-Upon-Avon, February 2008.

14. W.B. Worthen, *Shakespeare and the Authority of Performance* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 6.

15. Wells, *Re-editing Shakespeare*, 61.

16. Worthen, *Authority of Performance*, 7.

17. Worthen, *Authority of Performance*, 21.

18. Ron Rosenbaum, *The Shakespeare Wars, advanced uncorrected proofs* (New York: Random House, 2006), 181.

19. Tucker, *Acting Shakespeare*, 224.

20. See note 9.

21. Wells and Taylor, *Oxford Shakespeare, King Lear*.

22. Stephen Greenblatt, *The Norton Shakespeare, Based on the Oxford Edition* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc, 1997), *King Lear*.

23. Wells, *Re-editing Shakespeare*, 49.

24. Bate and Rasmussen, R*SC Shakespeare*, preface, 6.

25. Bate and Rasmussen, R*SC Shakespeare*, preface, 7.