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5

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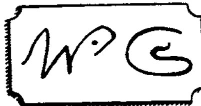

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RESTORING SHAKESPEARE: THE MODERN EDITOR'S TASK

BY

PETER ALEXANDER

Abuse of the commentators and of the editors is a form of recreation with which many readers of Shakespeare have from time to time diverted themselves. Familiar, perhaps from their early years, with his plays in some well-known and standard text, they come in their maturer days upon remarks that disturb their repose in their long-cherished knowledge or on suggestions that offend their sense of propriety. Such reactions may be wise or unwise according to circumstances and the capacity of the reader; they are at least natural, but only some familiarity with the commentator's problem will enable even the judicious reader to pass a fair judgement on new suggestions and to reject them, if necessary, with the charitable allowance that the case usually deserves. For the commentator is doing his best to help in what is both a difficult and a delicate task, and only an arrogant assumption of omniscience on his part should call forth the reader's objurgation.

The offended, and often incensed, reader is of course in good company. The poets themselves have not hesitated to abuse the 'classical' editors whose monuments are now preserved in the particular Pantheon which their successors of to-day enter with reverence. The remarks which Keats made in his copy of Shakespeare have been preserved and edited for us, and they show how little compunction he felt in discharging on the eighteenth-century editors a fusillade of the most uncomplimentary comment. "Lo fool again!" after some weighty pronouncement by Dr Johnson himself is not uncharacteristic of the taxation, in the Shakespearian sense of that word, to which the learned editors are subjected. But Keats was a poet to the manner born and native to a domain which even Dr Johnson entered at his peril. The question whether Keats was always justified in his censure is not for the moment at issue; only those however, it is clear, who feel as free and sure in the element in which Keats soared should venture on the critical flights he naturally allowed himself.

There is too, the irate reader may plead, the example of the commentators themselves, for they have not spared one another. "Perhaps", as Dr Johnson observed, "the lightness of the matter may conduce to the vehemency of the agency; when the truth to be investigated is so near to inexistence, as to escape attention, its bulk is to be enlarged by rage and exclamation." The example set by the offenders themselves is not one that can be recommended as a model of general deportment, and their mutual censures often point the moral of the futility of such exasperation. To assess the relative merits of the editors would be an invidious and perhaps odious task; but whatever the judgement given after such a scrutiny, the claims of Theobald would have to be weighed with care. Yet Theobald is the first hero of the *Dunciad*, a poem by the poet who may be considered the outstanding man of genius who has given his time to editing Shakespeare. But in editing Shakespeare the race has not always been to the swift or the battle to the strong. Those who have done most to elucidate Shakespeare are not of the type

of which Bentleys, Porsons and Housmans have been made; and Dr Johnson could describe Theobald as a man of narrow comprehension and small acquisitions, though there is no modern edition of Shakespeare that does not include many of the happy suggestions first proposed by Theobald.

Before condemning the commentators there is a story of W. G. Grace the reader would do well to remember. To a proud mother who introduced her son to Grace as a prodigy that had never dropped a catch, the Doctor replied: "He can't have played much cricket, Mam." The editor or commentator who has never made a bad shot is unlikely to have made any good ones. In the earlier days of editing the commentator was without the numerous aids that are now available in the shape of concordance and dictionary, and he laboured in the belief that the field needed a more thoroughgoing weeding than we now know was required. Those who fancied that Shakespeare's manuscripts had been left to the care of door-keepers and prompters were bolder in the exercise of conjecture than those can be who believe that in many instances the text they examine was printed from Shakespeare's own manuscript. The exuberance of conjecture in the earlier editors now that time has blown aside the froth, or filtered the body of their work from the lees, yields a lasting satisfaction to readers of Shakespeare. Beside the abandon of the early editors the circumspection that is required of their successors may seem unheroic, and modern corrections uninspired.

Most modern corrections are strictly speaking not emendations at all, but merely restorations of what was there already before the editorial process began. Compared with the *lucida tela diei*—the words of Lucretius that Housman so aptly used of those divinations that turn the obscurity of corruption to the sunshine of poetry—modern corrections seem matter-of-fact observations that afford merely a comfortable daylight. The reader confronted with the Folio text at *Timon of Athens*, IV, iii, 12,

> It is the Pastour Lards, the Brothers sides,
> The want that makes him leaue:

may fail to see what relevance such words have in Timon's fierce denunciation of his fellows and their society. But read

> It is the pasture lards the rother's sides
> The want that makes him lean

(where "rother" means "ox") and all is clear in sense and appropriate to the misanthrope's mood. This is a good instance of the contribution editors have made to the reader's ease and enjoyment. Those who are oblivious of their debts, and yet exclaim against their benefactors, should be condemned to read their Shakespeare only in the original texts. The modern editor despairs of achieving so startling a transformation in reading as Rowe and Collier effected in these two lines. He is working on a close glean'd field, and though there is sufficient left to satisfy the ambition of genius, the modern editor has usually to be content with a more modest return.

In the Globe text, prepared for Macmillan and Co. in 1864, the editors Clark and Wright marked with an obelus passages that seemed to them corrupt and to have defied emendation. Two of these passages have recently been corrected by Percy Simpson, with no or with so

little change in the text that they may serve as typical instances of the kind of correction that is perhaps most characteristic of recent years. At *The Tempest*, III, i, 14–15, the Folio reads:

> But these sweet thoughts, doe euen refresh my labours,
> Most busie lest, when I doe it.

Ferdinand, in the midst of his log-carrying, is musing on Miranda. Many suggestions have been proposed to make sense of the second line; but, as Simpson observes, the comma after "lest", the stumbling-block in the expression, need be regarded not as a modern comma separating "lest" (=least) from what follows but as a mark of emphasis binding it to the final words. The sense is clear: Ferdinand is busiest when thinking of Miranda, and the text can stand when the dramatist's punctuation is translated into modern terms.

Simpson's correction illustrates what is now an important question for editors: the interpretation of the punctuation of the early copies. Before the work of the bibliographers—Pollard, McKerrow and Sir Walter Greg—few regarded that punctuation as of any significance. Simpson, however, converted many to a different view, and before him Alfred Thiselton had used it to advantage. Now that our ideas of the history of the text are so altered, much attention is necessarily given to such detail. Where doctors disagree the laymen may be permitted to suspend judgement, for the critics are not unanimous about the interpretation of the punctuation; but the main point is not in debate: the punctuation demands study and may prove significant. As an illustration of the possibilities in this field two further corrections may be cited. At *Merry Wives of Windsor*, III, iii, 69–70, the Folio reads:

> I see what thou wert if Fortune thy foe, were
> not Nature thy friend.

Clark and Wright do not obelize the passage, but their version:

> I see what thou wert, if Fortune thy foe were not,
> Nature thy friend.

is not satisfactory, and various emendations have been proposed. Here again the interpretation turns on the significance of the comma. Falstaff is trying to flatter Mistress Ford by admiring her parts—those that Nature gave her—and insisting how they would adorn a more exalted rank in society and the attire that is associated with such a station. But Fortune is her foe, since, as Rosalind reminds us, "Fortune reigns in gifts of the world, not in the lineaments of Nature": Mistress Ford is merely a citizen's wife. The comma therefore after "foe" is an emphatic one joining it to "were" and the passage should read:

> I see what thou wert if Fortune thy foe were
> —not Nature—thy Friend.

For if Fortune were her friend (not Nature, for Nature is that already) she would have the position in the world to match the lineaments that Nature has given her. Again at *All's Well that Ends Well*, IV, iii, 295, the Folio reads:

> A pox upon him for me, he's more and more a Cat.

Editors usually adopt the Folio punctuation, but the passage should stand in a modernized text as,

> A pox upon him! For me he's more and more a Cat.

for the comma is again for emphasis.

These may seem slight and unimportant corrections, and so they are no doubt to the general reader. But they involve very important principles of interpretation that must eventually determine the correct reading at a number of places in the text of some of the best-known plays—places where the general reader, however indifferent to editorial principles, would at once be arrested by changes in the long-familiar wording.

Simpson's second correction requires no change whatever in the text. At *Love's Labour's Lost*, v, ii, 67–8, the Quarto reads:

> So perttaunt like would I ore'sway his state,
> That he should be my foole, and I his fate.

The Folio, which is more or less a reprint of the Quarto, reads similarly, with "pertaunt" for "perttaunt". This word is, of course, the crux of the matter, and many emendations have been proposed and some adopted in texts. But Simpson has shown why it must remain as it is in the early versions. He is able to cite the following passage, in support of his contention, from a treatise on certain terms used in card games: "A double Paire Royall, or a Paire-Taunt, is four cards of a sort." "Pertaunt" is therefore in all probability a winning holding or declaration at the obsolete game of 'Post and Pair'; and it would be in place in *Love's Labour's Lost* where the Queen and her three ladies may be said to be four of a sort about to win the hand from the love-lorn King and his gentlemen in the scene that immediately follows.

Dover Wilson has made another restoration to the text at *Titus Andronicus*, II, iii, 222, that seems as certain as Simpson's in *Love's Labour's Lost*. The readings in the First Quarto and the Folio are given in that order:

> Lord *Bassianus* lies bereaud in blood,
> Lord *Bassianus* lies embrewed heere,

The reading of the First Quarto (1594) was changed in the Second Quarto (1600) to what now stands in the Folio, and the Folio obtained this wording from the Third Quarto (1611), for the Folio is substantially a reprint of the edition of 1611, although there are certain additions from manuscript material. The changes made in the Second Quarto were in part due to the fact that the printer was working from a damaged copy of the First Quarto. The particular alteration now under consideration, however, seems to have been made because the word "bereaud" did not make sense. But Dover Wilson's suggestion that "bereaud" is a misprint for "beray'd" ("bereied") seems as certain as such suggestions can be; for the word is certainly used by the dramatists in the sense required here, e.g. Beaumont and Fletcher's *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, II, iv, 20:

> Unless it were by chance I did beray me—

where "beray" means "befoul".

Dover Wilson's correction here illustrates a principle he has been at some pains to emphasize, particularly in his work on the text of *Hamlet*. The words, in the Folio text, "embrewed heere" do make sense of a sort; the First Quarto reading does not, at least at first sight. But here as in *Hamlet* Dover Wilson insists that where we may suspect the later reading of being itself an

attempt to restore the sense to a passage that is obscured in an earlier version, we must address ourselves to the original obscurity for the correct interpretation and not be content with words that may indeed make sense, but not perhaps the precise sense intended by the author.

This correction also illustrates another aspect of emendation to which Dover Wilson has given much attention. It is not an exact restoration of the word of the text; there is a slight alteration, but of nothing more than a letter. This kind of correction in which the editor tries to restore the original by some trifling adjustment of the letters is, if Housman is to be believed, a favourite resource of Scots editors, for these cautious souls seemed to him to trust overmuch to this apparently conservative expedient. Dover Wilson has, however, made a special study of the handwriting used by Shakespeare, and a comparison of certain quarto and folio texts does bear out his contention that certain letters in that script do lend themselves to confusion one with another. Perhaps in his pleasure at finding a new key to certain difficulties he has overstressed its importance, but the next correction shows a very neat and certain use of the *ductus litterarum* by two American scholars.

At *Merchant of Venice*, III, i, 111–12, the Folio reads:

> I thanke thee good *Tuball*, good newes, good newes:
> ha, ha, here in Genowa.

The puzzling word is "here", for the speakers are in Venice; and "where" or some other word disposing of the confusion is usually substituted. But the American editors Neilson and Hill have by the simplest of devices made all clear. The letters most regularly confused by the compositors working from a script such as Shakespeare's are final *e* and *d*. Good instances of such a confusion in the printing of Shakespeare's text are so numerous that illustration is unnecessary, especially as it can be seen so clearly here. If the final *e* in "here" should be *d*, we have "herd", a spelling of "heard", and what Shylock says, as one can see from Tubal's earlier remark ("as I heard in Genowa"), is

> ha, ha, heard in Genowa.

This type of correction which not only restores a sense required by the context, but which also provides, as it were, its own justification on transcriptional grounds is naturally felt to be specially satisfactory; but many good corrections do not carry with them an explanation of the confusion that has given rise to them, and we can see from a comparison of versions that may be independent of each other (e.g. the First Quarto and the Folio texts of *Othello*) that confusions or alterations do occur that no tracing or readjustment of the letters could unravel or explain.

It is often possible, however, especially where we have for a particular play two versions that are printed from different manuscripts and we can obtain a more stereoscopic view, as it were, of the text than one version would afford us, to offer some justification based on transcriptional grounds for the proposed correction. At *Troilus and Cressida*, V, vii, 11–12, the readings of the First Quarto and the Folio are in that order as follows:

> now my double hen'd spartan,...lowe the
> bull has the game, ware hornes ho?

> now my double hen'd sparrow...lowe; the
> bull has the game: ware hornes ho?

The "doubled hen'd spartan" or "double hen'd sparrow" has naturally been found perplexing; but Leon Kellner (in his *Restoring Shakespeare*, p. 55) proposes to read "double horn'd Spartan". This fits the context admirably. Menelaus the Spartan is fighting with Paris, and, as Paris has seduced Helen, her first husband is given the cuckold's horns by that scurvy commentator Thersites. Here we have to suppose that the Quarto compositor misread "horned" as "hen'd" and that the editor or corrector who was preparing a copy of the printed Quarto, to give to the printer for use as his copy in printing the Folio, failed to make the necessary correction. The corrector had before him not only the First Quarto but a manuscript, perhaps in Shakespeare's own hand and not too clear in places, and, puzzled by the Quarto reading and finding his manuscript difficult to decipher, made a shot at the meaning and hit on the wrong word. The strength of Kellner's correction, however, does not depend on any guess we may make as to the origin and history of the corruption but almost solely on its fitness to the immediate context and propriety in the light of the larger context of Shakespeare's style and manner.

Very few of Shakespeare's plays have come down to us in two texts, each printed from a manuscript of a different kind from the other, and where the Quarto text has not been used in some form as copy for the Folio. *Othello* perhaps provides one of these exceptional opportunities for a comparison of two such texts. Neither the Quarto nor the Folio text is free from corruption, but so well do they supplement each other that the evidence we have for *Othello* is unusually good. Two recent corrections in this text may illustrate some of the considerations arising from a study of this evidence. At v, ii, 68–70 the Quarto and Folio read:

FOLIO	QUARTO
Oth. He hath confest.	He has confest.
Des. What, my Lord?	What, my Lord?
Oth. That he hath us'd thee.	That he hath...uds death.

The readings "us'd thee" and "uds death" have been regarded as variants; but a consideration of the nature of the texts suggests that they are each a part and a different part of the original, and that only when they are both included do we get what Shakespeare intended Othello to say. In a modernized text the passage should stand:

Des. What, my Lord?
Oth. That he hath—ud's death!—us'd thee.

The explanation of the difference between the Folio and Quarto texts presents in this instance no difficulty. The Quarto compositor fell into the well-known type of trap set by similar beginnings to adjacent phrases: the likeness of "uds" to "usd" leads to the omission of the second limb. The Folio compositor was working from a different manuscript, and this had been purged of the oaths and asseverations such as "uds death" that are so frequent a feature in the other text: "uds death" had been marked for omission and the Folio compositor accordingly omitted it; the conclusion that is essential to the thought of the passage was, however, naturally retained. From the context we see that Othello can hardly bring himself to utter the words that he feels of such terrible significance, and the Quarto phrase emphasizes the struggle with which he expresses himself.

In another place in *Othello* the restoration proposed by Richard Flatter seems as warranted. In the quarrel in the guard-room the wounded Montano, according to the Folio, II, iii, 64, exclaims:

> I bleed still, I am hurt to th' death. He dies.

while the Quarto reads:

> Zouns, I bleed still, I am hurt, to the death:

Editors have regarded the termination of the Folio line—"He dies"—as a stage direction, inserted in the Folio text by some confusion of mind on the part of the individual responsible for its preparation for the printer, and included by the printer, confused in his turn by the addition, as part of the dialogue. Montano does not die, nor does it seem probable that he faints, as some editors suggest, for he at once closes with the drunken Cassio, as the exclamations of Othello and Iago indicate. It is hard therefore to resist Flatter's conclusion that "He dies" is really, as the Folio indicates, a part of the dialogue and is the expression of Montano's determination to retaliate on the man who has wounded him so grievously. The Quarto printer may have omitted the phrase for the same reason that modern editors have rejected it. It seemed odd, and could not be a stage direction. The colon after "death" may suggest that the Quarto printer did at first intend to add something, though such evidence is not indeed conclusive.

One last example of the dovetailing of texts must suffice as illustration of that process. Here the second text is a bad quarto, put together by needy actors, and printed by an unscrupulous stationer. At 2 *Henry VI*, IV, i, 68–71, the Folio reads:

> *Lieu.* Conuey him hence, and on our long boats side
> Strike off his head. *Suf.* Thou dar'st not for thy owne.
> *Lieu.* *Poole*, Sir *Poole*? Lord,
> I kennel, puddle, sinke, whose filth and dirt
> Troubles the siluer Spring, where England drinkes:

The Bad Quarto, changing the Lieutenant to a Captain, reports this passage as follows:

> *Suf.* Thou darste not for thine owne.
> *Cap.* Yes Poull.
> *Suffolke.* Poull.
> *Cap.* I Poull, puddle, kennell, sinke and durt,

Capell, making use of the Bad Quarto, reconstructed the text as we have it to-day:

> *Suf.* Thou darest not, for thy own.
> *Cap.* Yes, Pole.
> *Suf.* Pole!
> *Cap.* Pool! Sir Pool! lord!
> Ay, kennel, puddle, sink, *etc.*

Capell noted that the disrespectful form of address "Pole" draws from the Duke of Suffolk, whose name was William de la Pole, the outraged exclamation "Pole!". But the texts fit more neatly than Capell observed and the hardly intelligible "Pool! Sir Pool! lord!" can be

eliminated. If the two versions are superimposed (the Quarto version modified for comparison):

Lieu. *Poole,* Sir *Poole?* Lord,
Cap. Poull. *Suffolke.* Poull. *Cap.*

We can see that the Folio printer, confused by his copy, should have read:

Lieu. Poole. *Suf.* Poole! *Lieu.*

—although he would put *Poole* in italic as a proper name. The passage as modernized should therefore stand:

Lieutenant. Poole.
Suffolk. Poole!
Lieutenant. Ay, kennel, puddle, sink, etc.

These illustrations of modern 'corrections' that improve the text by restoring it more or less to the condition in which it was first transmitted to us may conclude with two examples of the art of the late Alfred Thiselton. At times he stoutly defended what is undoubtedly corrupt and unacceptable but, though he may have dropped some catches, he did excellent work in the Shakespearian field. *Measure for Measure*, IV, i, 61–3, where the Duke somewhat suddenly muses on the slanders that assail the man in authority, reads in the Folio:

Volumes of report
Run with these false, and most contrarious Quest
Upon thy doings:

Editors usually read:

Run with these false and most contrarious quests

but there is no need to remove the comma or make "Quest" a plural noun. As Thiselton observes: "'Quest' is of course the verb—capitalized because it is a technical term of the chase and used metaphorically—which signifies the giving tongue of the dog on the scent of game. 'Most contrarious Quest' is best explained by the phrase 'hunt-counter'." Thiselton's explanation is as neat as it is conclusive. The second example, for there are others to choose from, may be taken from *Antony and Cleopatra*, V, ii, 93–100, where the Folio reads:

Cleo. Thinke you there was, or might be such a man
As this I dreampt of?
Dol. Gentle Madam, no.
Cleo. You Lye up to the hearing of the Gods:
But if there be, nor euer were one such
It's past the size of dreaming: Nature wants stuffe
To vie strange formes with fancie, yet t'imagine
An *Anthony* were Natures peece, 'gainst Fancie,
Condemning shadowes quite.

The "nor" in "if there be, nor euer were" is usually changed to "or", but this destroys the sense and continuity of Cleopatra's argument. She first asks:

Think you there was, or might be such a man?

And when the answer is No, she insists that there might be and was indeed one such by asking, How, if there neither is nor ever were a man like Antony, could we possibly imagine him? For his greatness exceeds our powers of imagination. The "nor ever" implies the negative in the first alternative. Though I am aware that there are good judges who still prefer the "or ever" of the Third Folio, I am persuaded that Thiselton is right and that the First Folio reading should stand.

This final 'correction', however doubtful, is submitted to the reader's judgement to suggest to him that the textual critic even when agonizing over the choice between 'or' and 'nor' may be making a genuine effort to interpret Shakespeare and that this critical task, however humble in comparison with the great work of the literary masters in exploring the profundities of Shakespeare's mind and art, is a useful contribution to the interpretation, criticism and enjoyment of Shakespeare.