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Part One

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1 | Introduction

> [I]f scholars were misguided in their assessments of the two original printed texts of *King Lear* – if . . . these are not two *relatively corrupted* texts of a pure (but now lost) original, but two *relatively reliable* texts of two different versions of the play (as we now think) – then our general methods for dealing with such texts [are] called into serious question.
>
> Jerome McGann[1]

In the fifteen-year period 1594–1609, versions of eighteen recently performed Shakespearean plays reached print in inexpensive quarto or octavo editions. From the beginning of the Shakespeare editorial tradition in the eighteenth century, editors and textual critics have been particularly perplexed by five of these playtexts: Q1 *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), Q1 *Henry 5* (1600), Q1 *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1602), Q1 *Hamlet* (1603), Q1 *Pericles* (1609).

This perplexity was caused by the suspicion that the London play-reading public was being offered a product very different from that given the London play-going public (even though all of these texts advertised recent performance on their title-pages).[2] Certain unusual features in these first editions (imperfect metre, blunt dialogue, and allegedly jejune depiction of characters and development of situations) were deemed incompatible with composition by a proficient commercial playwright and performance by a leading company. Furthermore, these five early playtexts were all suspiciously brief (particularly in comparison with subsequent quarto versions released during Shakespeare's lifetime, and with the Folio collection of Shakespeare's works prepared by his theatre colleagues, Heminge and Condell, after his death).[3]

Comparison of these first editions with the later versions revealed much textual reordering/disordering of phrasing, the earlier text being

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considered the poorer; in some instances these first editions provided totally different action; and, most significantly, in all instances their text had been rejected by Heminge and Condell as copy for their Folio collection. Following a suggestion by A. W. Pollard in 1909, modern critics came to agree that Heminge and Condell had these five playtexts in mind (and possibly others; see below) when, in an address '*To the great Variety of Readers*', prefaced to the First Folio, they inveighed against the 'frauds and stealthes of iniurious impostors' who had deceived the book-buying public with 'stolne, and surreptitious copies'. Heminge and Condell invite the prospective buyer to ignore these playtexts, all of which have been replaced in the Folio with texts which are 'perfect of their limbes'.[4]

Pollard's analysis of Heminge and Condell's rhetoric was (and still is) considered of the greatest importance in that it solved one of textual studies' besetting problems: to which texts were Heminge and Condell referring as 'stolne, and surreptitious'? To clarify matters Pollard christened the five perplexing quarto texts 'bad', thus differentiating them from the 'good' quartos (whose texts Heminge and Condell printed in the Folio without substantial change).[5] In 1910 W. W. Greg subjected one of Pollard's 'bad' quartos, that of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1602), to close analysis, and offered an explanation for the text's poor quality and evident abbreviation. The quarto, he suggested, could have been concocted from memory principally by the actor who had played the part of 'mine Host'.[6] Greg's suggestion provides the foundation for the phenomenon we now know as 'memorial reconstruction' or 'reporting'.

Refined and adapted over the years by Greg and his successors, the constituent elements of memorial reconstruction are as follows: actors deprived of the playbook of a text they had performed in London;[7] actors on tour in the provinces, probably during the plague periods during which the London authorities enforced closure of the city's theatres; provincial audiences with less theatrical stamina and cruder artistic palates requiring shorter plays and more comic turns; actors' inaccurate memories producing a nonetheless actable text in which accidental memorial omission and deliberate abridgement coexist with gratuitous memorial expansion of comic lines and situations designed to please the less sophisticated; and adaptation to enable the company to perform with the reduced numbers thought to typify touring companies. Although the text was reconstructed

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to provide a playbook for performance, the actors evidently did not object to profiting further from their mental effort, and so sold the text to a stationer when they returned to the Capital. Individually or together, these details feature in the introductions to most recent scholarly editions of Shakespeare plays which exist in a 'bad' text, and the scenario, unconvincing as it may sound when its salient features are listed thus bluntly, has become a *sine qua non* of textual studies. As recently as 1982, Harold Jenkins could describe the identification of memorial reconstruction as 'one of the achievements of twentieth-century textual scholarship'.[8]

Pollard's group of five 'bad' texts, listed above, was later supplemented by Q1 *The Taming of A Shrew* (1594), Q1 *1 Contention* (1594), and O1 *Richard Duke of York* (1595). Despite the variant titles, and the sometimes marked verbal and structural divergences from the putative originals, these texts were held to be 'bad' versions of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, *2 Henry 6*, and *3 Henry 6*. To this group of eight texts was then added Q1 *Richard 3* (1597) and Q1 *King Lear* (1608), although, since these quartos were verbally closer to their counterparts in the First Folio than were those in the group of eight, they were sometimes classified as 'doubtful' (i.e. potentially 'bad' but not incontrovertibly so). Nonetheless, the view that memorial reconstruction also lay behind these two texts received substantial support. The higher level of accuracy in these texts was explained by a number of postulates: group reconstruction; supplementation from shorthand; better memory or greater familiarity with the original on the part of the reporter(s).

The concept of memorial reconstruction was thus applied to an extraordinarily heterogeneous collection of texts, from the verbally sound and dramatically sophisticated *Richard Duke of York* and *Richard 3*, to the short and staccato *Pericles* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. These texts, although grouped together as 'bad', actually had little in common beyond their exclusion from the First Folio. Nonetheless memorial reconstruction was adopted as a blanket classification for these ten Shakespearean texts, ossifying Greg's original tentative suggestion into textual orthodoxy.[9]

There are, however, several weak spots in the theory of memorial reconstruction as formulated by Greg and adopted by most of his successors. The first is its reliance on unproven and sometimes illogical assumptions. The largest assumption – that memorially reconstructed texts must

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have been made for the purposes of performance – has proved the most durable. It was 1990 before Paul Werstine first queried it, and in 1994 Janette Dillon objected to an unproven symbiosis: she argued that it was only the theory that actors were responsible for memorial reconstruction that had led to the hypothesis that memorial reconstructions were made for performance.[10]

To this performance hypothesis is added the scenario of provincial performance.[11] Greg acknowledges that his scenario depends not only on touring in the provinces but on prolonged touring (time being required for progressive adaptation of the playing text);[12] but, as E. K. Chambers pointed out in 1924, there is no evidence that drama was specially adapted or shortened for touring purposes, nor is there evidence that provincial audiences required shorter or bawdier plays. These hypotheses may indeed prevail but, in the absence of firm evidence, it seems unwise to found a theory on them.[13] Elizabethan drama did not replace medieval drama overnight but grew up alongside it; there are records of mystery cycles being performed in provincial towns as late as the 1570s and 1580s. It is hard to believe that local tradesmen could perform and watch these marathon medieval sequences with their theological and moral profundity (familiar though this was) yet be unable to tolerate sixteen lines of Juliet's lyric utterance. Indeed, towns such as York and Coventry were affluent textile centres and their culture may have been relatively sophisticated. We simply do not know as much as we would like about provincial aesthetic standards.

The second problem with Greg's argument paradoxically accounts for its popularity. The theory is capacious, being able to explain almost any textual problem. Thus: the text deteriorates towards the end? – the reporter's memory was flagging, or the character he played was dead and offstage. The text is consistently good? – it is a group reconstruction. One part is exceptionally good? – the reporter played that character, or perhaps a copy of his written part was available. Staging requirements are simple? – that indicates provincial auspices. The play is short? – that also indicates provincial auspices. The text is good? – the reporter was conscientious, his memory good. The text is bad? – the reporter only had a minor role. The action varies significantly from the later printed version? – it is a report of a revised version. Conveniently, the concept of memorial reconstruction can be expanded (and allied unobtrusively with other concepts) to explain

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textual, social, dramatic, economic, and demographic issues; like Lavache's 'O Lord sir', it serves fit to answer all questions. But, as Greg remarked in another context, 'an hypothesis which can explain anything is as useless as one which can explain nothing'.[14]

The enthusiasm with which the theory of memorial reconstruction was accepted can best be understood in relation to earlier theories held to account for suspect texts. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century editors had explained these texts as 1) source plays, 2) rough drafts by the young Shakespeare, 3) reports made in longhand by a thief in the audience, 4) reports made in shorthand by a thief in the audience, or 5) a combination of the above. The objections which were subsequently advanced to refute these five theories can be briefly summarised.

The evidently close relationship between the pairs of Q/F texts means that if, as theory 1 advocates, the earlier version served as source, there existed a dramatist with Shakespeare's ability in plotting, gift for characterisation, and interest in poetical experimentation who has left no other trace of his work. This is either unfortunate, or, as critics came to realise, improbable. Theory 2 presents Shakespeare 'in the workshop', where G. I. Duthie, among others, objected to the notion of a Shakespeare who graduated very rapidly from 'quite miserable ineptitude in his early days to complete perfection within comparatively few years'.[15] The view contained in theory 3 is supported by external testimonies to the frequent presence of table-books in playhouses. This theory involves the complicating factor of theft – someone trying to acquire a text without the company's knowledge (the motive behind the acquisition being open to various interpretations) – and the objections to this were two-fold: a scribe with pencil (or pen) and paper would surely be an obvious presence in the playhouse; and, if this method of play reproduction were a threat to the players, it is hard to see why (since the suspect texts appeared over a number of years) they did not employ someone within the theatre to be alert to potential offenders – a textual bouncer, pledging (in the manner of Horatio): 'If he steale ought the whil'st this Play is Playing, / And scape detecting, I will pay the Theft' (*Hamlet* TLN 1940–1). Theory 4, being a variant of theory 3, invites the same objections, added to which not one of the shorthand systems before 1602 was known to be capable of reproducing a play, and none in the decade before or after was intended to.

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Enter, then, memorial reconstruction, a theory which has two attractions: it is economic, allowing us to dispense with source plays, shorthand, longhand note-taking, revision, or any combination of the above; and it is versatile, being able to explain almost any textual problem (even if, as we have seen, it sometimes requires supplementation from other theories).

Sustained challenges to the concept and application of memorial reconstruction first came with re-examination of Q1 *King Lear*. In 1976 Michael Warren presented an analysis of *King Lear* at the International Shakespeare Congress in Washington. Focusing on the differences between Edgar and Albany in Q and F, differences which 'go beyond those which may be expected when two texts descend in corrupted form from a common original', he concluded that 'a substantial and consistent recasting of certain aspects of the play has taken place'.[16] In other words both texts were written by Shakespeare, both are 'good'; F *King Lear* is a Shakespearean text representing the author's second thoughts after composition and production of the equally Shakespearean Q *King Lear*. Steven Urkowitz argued in a similar manner in 1980 in *Shakespeare's Revision of King Lear* (the title serves as summary), and over the next three years Michael Warren and Gary Taylor edited *The Division of the Kingdoms*, a collection of twelve essays committed to the exploration of Q and F *King Lear* as alternative texts.

As the 1980s progressed, the challenge to memorial reconstruction widened. Hibbard and Werstine investigated the question of revision in relation to *Hamlet*, and Taylor applied it to *Henry 5*.[17] In a series of papers Urkowitz expressed doubts about memorial reconstruction as a viable explanation for Q1 *1 Contention*, O1 *Richard Duke of York*, Q1 *Romeo and Juliet*, Q1 *Richard 3*, Q1 *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and Q1 *Hamlet*, championing instead the notion of Shakespearean revision in all of these plays. Randall McLeod queried the validity of the distinction drawn by Pollard between 'good' and 'bad' quartos, and his denial of the usefulness of these terms received support from Scott McMillin in two separate studies of casting.[18] This flurry of textual inquiry challenged the twentieth century's most deeply rooted beliefs and cherished assumptions about 'bad' quartos.

Whether or not one acknowledges revision as a replacement paradigm for memorial reconstruction,[19] it is obvious that this diagnostic *volte face* on *King Lear* has dealt a severe blow to the linked concepts of 'bad' quartos and

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memorial reconstruction. If Q *King Lear* is indeed a *bona fide* authorial text rather than a corrupt memorial derivative, how had we misdiagnosed it for so long?[20] How could the 'evidence' for memorial reconstruction suddenly become 'evidence' for revision? Does the phenomenon of memorial reconstruction exist? If so, what constitutes reliable evidence for it? Current theories invoking revision do not simply question our conclusions; they undermine our methods. And if our methods were faulty in classifying Q *King Lear* as 'memorial', why should we retain this diagnosis for the other Shakespearean playtexts on the blacklist of memorial reconstructions? What need ten be memorial, or five? What need one? Furthermore, how many non-Shakespearean playtexts had been similarly misdiagnosed?

These are the questions which lie behind the present study. Starting from a position of interrogative scepticism, my aim is to chart the topography of an area which is riddled with problems from ignorance at one end to false assurance at the other, with confusion occupying the middle ground.

This confusion has as its origin the following: 1) our criteria for diagnosing the textual effects of faulty memory in playtexts are unmethodical; 2) our understanding of how Elizabethan memory operated and what it aimed to achieve is hypothetical; 3) our textual context is negligible; and 4) our terminology is casual. The detailed analysis in the ensuing chapters will demonstrate that this four-fold claim is not exaggerated. The discussion in this introduction illustrates but the heart of the confusion.

The first two categories, diagnostic criteria and understanding of the *modus operandi* of Elizabethan memory, can be considered together. Traditional attempts to diagnose ('prove') the influence of faulty memory in a playtext typically rely on a heterogeneous collection of textual quiddities. Consider the following four approaches, not one of which doubts that we know what characterises a reported text, yet all of which place different emphases on a miscellaneous range of evidence.

A. S. Cairncross tells us that Q1 *1 Contention* 'has all the recognized features of . . . a report – abbreviation, transposition of material, the use of synonyms, recollections external and internal; with inferior metre, and verse wrongly divided as prose'.[21] Brian Gibbons finds in Q1 *Romeo and Juliet* 'anticipations, recollections, transpositions, paraphrases, summaries, repetitions and omissions of words, phrases or lines correctly presented in Q2'.[22] For H. J. Oliver, Q1 *The Taming of A Shrew* suffers from lack of

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literary merit, weakness in meaning, incompetent versification, slackness in diction, incompetent storytelling, superfluous stage directions. He adds: '[f]eeble repetition of words is one of the many characteristics that *A Shrew* shares with acknowledged "Bad Quartos". A further instance is the willingness to begin several successive lines with "and"'.[23] In his preface to the BBC TV Shakespeare edition of *Richard 3* John Wilders tells us that the First Quarto of the play 'seems to have been what is called a "memorial reconstruction"; in other words, it was dictated to the printer from memory by some of the actors who had taken part in it and their memories were not altogether accurate.'[24]

The above examples indiscriminately combine features of process ('dictated to the printer'), origin ('actors who had taken part in it'), literary judgement ('incompetent storytelling'), and mnemonic psychology ('anticipations, recollections' and so on). They are a heterogeneous collection, rather than a meaningful hierarchy. The disadvantages of such eclecticism are best illustrated in an article by Harry R. Hoppe in which 'mislining' as a symptom of deficient memory jostles shoulders with 'repetition'.[25] Furthermore, every one of the above features mentioned by Cairncross, Gibbons, and Oliver, can, individually, be paralleled in playtexts which are not considered by critics to be memorially reconstructed. When does incompetent versification, or lack of literary merit, or transposition, or dictation suggest memorial reconstruction rather than a hack writer, or collaborative authorship, or a revising playwright, or an overworked scribe, to name but a few of the possibilities? Where is the dividing line?

This diagnostic double-standard was inadvertently revealed by Greg in an analysis of Chapman's 'negligence or oversight' in *A Humorous Day's Mirth* (1599). Of one fifteen-line speech Greg commented:

> The conceit may not be wholly to our taste, but the writing is characteristic enough and not lacking in vigour. It is plain however from the *repetitions* and the *breakdown of grammar* and *metre* that the passage cannot have been meant to stand as it now appears. Exactly by what process of *revision* and *interlineation* it reached its present chaotic state it is impossible to say. [my emphasis][26]

Here Greg uses repetitions and broken-down grammar and verse to support a hypothesis of revision and interlining; elsewhere (in *Two*

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Elizabethan Stage Abridgements, for example), he uses the same evidence to support a hypothesis of memorial reconstruction. Greg serendipitously calls attention to our dilemma: the difficulty of finding features which are *exclusively* indicative of memorial reconstruction.

Judging from the studies of 'bad' texts to date it seems that the diagnostic criterion is accumulation: the more examples from the features cited above by Cairncross *et al.* that the 'bad' text has, the more likely it is to be memorially reconstructed. This incremental technique might be of some use if it did not accord all putative indications of faulty memory equal value: one descriptive stage direction equals one mangled verse line, and one repeated word equals one transposition. But surely some indications are more equal than others? Surely some hierarchy ought to prevail?

This lack of diagnostic rigour is evident in early studies by Greg, Hoppe, and Kirschbaum (all of which include some non-Shakespearean 'bad' texts). Kirschbaum's otherwise useful 'Census of Bad Quartos' made no attempt to analyse the procedure for identifying memorially reconstructed texts, relying instead on a miscellany of textual infelicities, and impressionistic statements like the following:

> Having completed an exhaustive examination of the extant *Pericles*, I can report that all the various kinds of corruption found in it have their parallel in other bad versions.
>
> There are in Q [*A Knack to Know an Honest Man*] certain characteristics of bad quartos in general which definitely admit it into the category of such texts. I cannot go into the matter at present. The apparent corruption of the following lines should be evidence enough: [quotation of lines 159–68].
>
> *George a Greene* . . . is clearly as 'maimed and deformed' a report as *Orlando Furioso*. The following lines cannot conceivably be as the author wrote them [quotation of lines 543–82].[27]

Hoppe's work depends on circular reasoning: other plays contain features typical of memorial reconstruction (e.g. *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*, *John of Bordeaux*, *The Old Wife's Tale*); Q1 *Romeo and Juliet* shares many of these features; *ergo* Q1 *Romeo and Juliet* is a memorial reconstruction. Kathleen Irace's computer-assisted study is a more precise variant of the old

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