

The Revision of "King Lear"

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THE REVISION OF 'KING LEAR.'

THE modern text of *King Lear* is founded partly on the editions brought out in Shakespeare's own lifetime, the two quartos of 1608, and partly on the folio of 1623. None of these, of course, were published by him, nor can they be considered authoritative.

A comparison between the early quartos and the first folio shows the usual marks of difference: the quartos (very much alike) were no doubt pirated editions, badly printed, badly spelt, and not divided into scenes; the folio is much better work from the publishers' point of view, but it was edited by actors and is likely to have been affected by some sort of stage corruption, and like several other plays in the folio, it has been shortened.

The question at issue is whether the folio edition shows also any traces of revision by the hand of Shakespeare.

Whether the missing passages could have been dropped by his authority is a question hardly worth arguing: it is certain that the folio version is cut for the stage, and even if Shakespeare mutilated his own text to suit an Elizabethan audience we could never know it: we could only say that the cuts were more or less judicious. Whether Shakespeare ever revised *King Lear* is a question, therefore, which cannot depend for its solution on the missing passages, unless indeed something new takes their place. As a matter of fact there is new matter in the folio, though it does not usually replace something dropped: it throws a great deal of light, however, on the question of a revision. So also would alterations; but in this play, except verbal differences, there are very few, and verbal differences are not much to argue from.

The dropped passages, the new passages, and the verbal differences have all been used to support and to refute the hypothesis of a revision. Delius, after much discussion, comes to the emphatic conclusion that no revision has taken place. Koppel, dealing with the matter at equal

length, arrives at an opposite conclusion. Schmidt follows Delius, and with few exceptions the modern critics take the same view,—against a revision. Mr Craig in the Arden edition, writing of the difference between quarto and folio says, 'We cannot with any certainty determine whether the author was in any way responsible for these differences. My study of the facts leads me to believe that he was not, and that we have no evidence that from the time he handed over the play to his Company, leaving it to them to deal with at their pleasure, he took any further care of it.'

I venture to question that opinion, because it seems to me that several important arguments have been lost sight of, and a line of reasoning is possible which has not yet been followed.

If every case is taken where the folio introduces new matter not found in the quartos, it happens in an extraordinary number of instances that the new matter is not necessary to the sense and would show no gap if omitted. Only 5 lines out of a total of 95 (according to Koppel's counting 110, but I am reckoning complete lines only) are in this sense necessary. When we consider how badly printed the quartos are, the fact is significant. Koppel has already noted and commented upon it.

What is equally significant, and what has not yet been noticed, is that the new matter, though thoroughly Shakespearean in manner, except perhaps one passage, sometimes shows traces of afterthought, as if it had been added when the original was not absolutely fresh in memory. As will be seen later, there are other characteristics suggesting afterthought, and it is often possible to detect a profound meaning in them. It is from this point of view that I propose discussing the new passages.

It would be well, if the case were being stated for the first time, to quote every case where the quarto¹ is supplemented by the folio; but Koppel has already done this, and, as might have been expected, a large number are inconclusive. I shall merely give references to these inconclusive instances, noting them as negative evidence in showing no gap if they are dropped. I omit single words and incomplete lines, unless spoken by a new character. The scenes and line numbers are from the Globe edition; the spelling has been modernised.

I, i, 164:

Albany and Cornwall. Dear sir, forbear.

¹ The text of the two quartos is substantially the same, and they are therefore referred to as 'the quarto.'

The line clashes with the 'do' which begins Kent's reply, and we find in the folio that 'do' has been omitted; modern editions retain it, and I suspect wrongly.

The rejection of 'do' points to a revision and suggests that 'Dear sir, forbear' is new matter, and not an instance of omission on the part of the quarto. The new line gives emphasis to Lear's rash temper—even Cornwall is moved to protest;—a similar interjection later (Albany: 'Pray, sir, be patient,' I, iv, 284) is also found only in the folio. Both could be omitted without showing a gap.

I, ii, 181—187. Edmund is speaking (after 'that's my fear')

.....I pray you, have a continent forbearance till the speed of his rage goes slower; and, as I say, retire with me to my lodging, from whence I will fitly bring you to hear my lord speak: pray ye, go; there's my key: if you do stir abroad, go armed.

Edgar. Armed, brother!

For this the quarto has 'go armed' after 'advise you to the best': modern editions, perhaps unnecessarily, retain it.

The folio lines, I suspect, were added to explain how it is that Edgar is supposed to have written to Edmund. They introduce for the first and last time a 'lodging' for Edmund that is other than Gloucester's home. The improbability of Edgar writing to Edmund when presumably both lived in the same house, is so obvious that something seemed wanting to make the device credible; Gloucester, it will be remembered, believes in it at once. One gathers from this passage that Edmund's lodging, where Edgar is to conceal himself and to which he is supposed to have written, is placed outside Gloucester's house: there is no other way of accounting for 'If you do stir abroad, go armed'; hiding in Gloucester's house would be odd enough, but going in and out of it, whether armed or not, would be madness. But this introduces a new difficulty. Everywhere else in the play it appears that Edgar, Edmund and Gloucester lived together: they are together in this scene and all three seem thoroughly at home; they are together again in II, i, and it is impossible to suppose anywhere else than in Gloucester's house, and at the same time this is evidently the place where Edgar has been in hiding ('Thy father watches; oh, sir, fly this place'). As Mr Bradley points out¹, they would never have been living together in II, i, after Edgar's warning, unless they had been doing so before.

The conclusion is forced upon us that Shakespeare's original conception was that Edmund should be living, as one would expect, in Gloucester's house; with this supposition we can accept the letter-

¹ *Modern Language Review*, October 1908 and January 1909.

writing as a rather clumsy stage device, but common enough. The new 'lodging' gave realism where realism was wanted, while the resulting confusion of places would be unnoticed.

There is a second inconsistency in the passage. If it always formed part of the original text why should Edgar say, almost immediately after being told to retire with Edmund to his lodging, 'Shall I hear from you anon'?

I, iv, 345—356 :

Gon. This man hath had good counsel :—a hundred knights !
'Tis politic and safe to let him keep
At point a hundred knights : yes, that, on every dream,
Each buzz, each fancy, each complaint, dislike,
He may enguard his dotage with their powers,
And hold our lives in mercy. Oswald, I say !

Alb. Well, you may fear too far.

Gon. Safer than trust too far.
Let me still take away the harms I fear,
Not fear still to be taken : I know his heart.
What he hath uttered I have writ my sister :
If she sustain him and his hundred knights
When I have show'd the unfitness.—

For this the quarto has :

Gon. What, Oswald, ho !

Oswald. Here, madam—

and omits the 'What, Oswald, ho !' of l. 336. The folio lines here show several indications of insertion, while there is no gap if they are omitted.

In the first place they greatly extend the time after Oswald's first calling until his appearance: in the quarto he is not called until l. 345 and then appears immediately; in the folio his call is put back to l. 336, before the fool's exit, and by delaying his answer time is given for the conversation quoted.

The artistic advantage is obvious: Goneril is *already* waiting for Oswald before entering upon this discussion with her husband; she spends an idle moment with him, interjecting her remarks with another impatient call, and breaks off the moment Oswald appears, not even caring to finish her sentence. If the quarto had merely dropped the Goneril-Albany discussion there would be no reason to find Oswald's first call displaced; it could never have happened by chance. The call seems purposely to have been put back in the folio in order to give a proper setting to new matter, that Goneril's explanation should be in character and perfunctory¹. It is worth noticing in this connec-

¹ The 'What, Oswald, ho !' of line 336 coming immediately after 'Pray you content' is in the same vein.

tion that I, iii, 16–20 is omitted in the folio and that possibly I, iii, 345–356 takes its place: from an artistic point of view it is better that Goneril should explain herself to her husband rather than to herself or to Oswald.

In the second place the folio passage is closely connected with another of six lines, II, iv, 142–47, which also is found only in the folio. It occurs early in the first meeting of Lear with Regan and shows that Regan knows the details of the quarrel—that Goneril has ‘restrained the riots of your followers’—and knows them through a letter¹. It may be supposed that Shakespeare had intended from the first that his audience should find Regan in possession of this knowledge before Lear’s arrival, but seeing that the point was not sufficiently clear, inserted the two passages, the one where Goneril describes the contents of her letter, and the other where Regan shows her knowledge of it.

The passage moreover contains some slight inconsistencies which suggest a rather careless insertion. Goneril says, ‘What he hath uttered I have writ my sister.’ Almost immediately afterwards in the part included in both folio and quarto she asks Oswald ‘Have you writ that letter to my sister?’ There are two inconsistencies here, and another in ‘What he hath uttered,’ for as far as we know from the play Lear’s only utterances on the subject are during this scene.

II, iv, 21 :

Kent. By Juno, I swear, ay !

It may be noted that the folio omits the preceding ‘No, no they would not’ and ‘Yes, they have.’ Perhaps this is a case of substitution.

II, iv, 99, 100 :

Glou. Well, my good lord, I have inform’d them so.

Lear. Inform’d them ! Dost thou understand me, man ?

and almost immediately afterwards, Lear speaking :

Are they inform’d of this ? My breath and blood !

Koppel has already noticed that these passages are related together, the first leading up to and accounting for the second. It is most unlikely that accidental omission in the quarto should have affected both, and as intentional omissions to shorten they are not worth making.

They are telling lines—as indeed are all the folio additions—but there is no gap if they are omitted.

¹ The presumed contents of the letter (I, iii, 25 and iv, 358), if we took the quarto version only, would be that Goneril had decided to slack her former services and let his knights have colder looks.

II, iv, 142—147. The passage has already been noted. There is no hiatus, as Koppel observes, if it is omitted.

III, i, 22—29:

Who have—as who have not, that their great stars
Throned and set high?—servants, who seem no less,
Which are to France the spies and speculations
Intelligent of our state; what hath been seen,
Either in snuffs and packings of the dukes,
Or the hard rein which both of them have borne
Against the old kind king; or something deeper,
Whereof, perchance, these are but furnishings.

This passage, wanting in the quarto, is immediately followed, ll. 30—42, by a passage omitted in the folio. For this coincidence one explanation only seems possible: the folio text must have been printed from a corrected quarto and the addition (in the folio) taken by the printers as a substitute for the quarto text. A similar instance occurs in *Love's Labour's Lost*, only in the reverse direction: a passage has been corrected and the correction taken to be an addition, so that we get the two versions one after the other. Here, in *Lear*, an addition has been taken to be a substitution. It is quite clear from the wording that it is not meant to be so: the two halves of the speech are of a totally different character, and the half which the folio omits is much the more important.

From an analysis of these two halves we may conclude that the folio portion, quoted above, was very likely not a part of the original text, but that the quarto portion must certainly have been so, and was not intended to be dropped. The quarto omits nothing essential: the division between Albany and Cornwall is given, then the expected arrival of the French, and finally Kent's request that his hearer should go to Dover and report. The folio enlarges a little on Albany and Cornwall's quarrel, and gives a reason how the French came to know of it; but it omits the essentials—the landing of the French and the despatch of the gentleman to Dover. Kent's 'If you shall see Cordelia, as no doubt you will' comes as a complete surprise in consequence. The passage as it stands in the folio looks like an insertion. We are told that France has heard of the 'hard rein' which *both* the dukes have borne against the King. It is quite impossible of course that France could then have heard anything of Cornwall and Regan's action, and it is not at all likely that Shakespeare would have written so, if the play as we have it had been produced at one time.

Koppel supposes the folio omission to be intentional—the sufferings of Lear being known in France (in the quarto only the quarrel between the

Dukes, of which advantage is taken for invasion), it becomes superfluous to send the gentleman to Dover. There is left for the audience a cheering assurance of approaching deliverance given by hints. Koppel in fact attempts to explain all the folio omissions as Shakespeare's own work and as deliberate improvements. The question of revision, however, does not depend on his success.

III, ii, 79—95. The fool remains behind to make a speech which is quite out of harmony with the rest of the scene. Most critics have taken it to be a non-Shakespearean insertion.

III, iv, 26, 27 :

In, boy ; go first. You houseless poverty—
Nay, get thee in. I'll pray, and then I'll sleep,

and almost immediately afterwards, l. 38,

Edgar. Fathom and half, fathom and half! Poor Tom!

There is again a distinct relation between these two passages, suggesting they were not cases of accidental omission. In the first Lear tells the fool to go before him into the hovel, and this naturally leads up to the second. The effect of Edgar's exclamation depends on our having seen the fool go in and having had our attention drawn to it.

III, vi, 92 :

Fool. And I'll go to bed at noon.

These are the last words spoken by the fool. It has been suggested by Mr Bradley that they are to foretell his death, and with the assistance of the actor they could easily convey that impression. But for them the fool passes out of the play as if forgotten or thrown aside after serving Shakespeare's purpose; it is possible that he added the line to remedy this, as an afterthought—surely the simplest and most effective way that even he could have chosen.

v, iii, 88 :

Goneril. An interlude!

and in the next line: 'Let the trumpet sound.' The latter restores the verse broken by 'An interlude,' thereby suggesting insertion. In the quarto Albany's speech runs on without interruption; it is very unlikely that the interruption and the half line then required to keep the verse should both have been accidentally dropped.

v, iii, 310 :

Do you see this? Look on her, look, her ps,
Look there, look there!

In the quarto Lear dies with a cry of pain. 'Break, heart, I prithee break' there given to Lear must in any case belong to Kent. In the folio the cry of pain is omitted, and Lear dies apparently with a sudden joy: he imagines a sign of life in Cordelia and swoons away on the instant. At first Shakespeare may not have intended to spare us anything: the function of evil is to destroy, was the dominant thought; and the pursuit of it relentless. A change of this kind would be in character with his later work.

The following passages supply only negative evidence, as leaving no gap if they are omitted: I, i, 42—5, 50 f., 65, 85 f., iv, 284, II, iv, 47—55, 299, iv, i, 7—9, ii, 26, vi, 169—173, v, ii, 11 (the last line), iii, 76, 222.

There are two passages which were probably accidental omissions in the quarto, and two which certainly were so. The first two, I, i, 90 f. ('*Lear*. Nothing! *Cordelia*. Nothing') and III, iv, 18 ('In such a night To shut me out! Pour on: I will endure'), are very intelligible printers' mistakes, the eye being caught by a repetition of the same words later; it should be noticed, however, that they show no gap if omitted. The others are III, vi, 13—15, v, iii, 144.

This completes the list of cases in which the folio gives matter which is not found in the quarto. From their number and nature only two suppositions seem tenable: either that the producer of the quarto eliminated passages here and there with the utmost nicety—hardly ever, as did the folio editors, making the mistake of showing a gap—that he sometimes removed subtle inconsistencies, but showed no other motive whatever for his selection; or our added passages are as a rule genuine insertions, and that a revision by the author has taken place. The general character of the quarto text, with its extraordinary blunders and careless editing, altogether negatives the former supposition and we are driven to accept a revision.

Supposing this has taken place, we should expect a certain amount of pruning as well as grafting; we can guess at one or two places. For instance I, iii, 16—20 and 24 may, as already noted, be intentional omissions in exchange for I, iii, 345—356; so too Edgar's soliloquy III, vi, 108—122, which is so little wanted that some editors suppose it not to be Shakespeare's.

As regards alterations. There are verbal differences, as there always are, between folio and quarto; but few, if any, show marks of revision. The folio corrects a great many obvious blunders; but, apart from that, is by no means always the better text. Two cases only seem recog-

nisable. In II, ii, 1 Oswald meets Kent outside Gloucester's castle; in the folio he says 'Good dawning to thee, friend'; in the quarto 'Good even.' Later on, in II, iv, 89, 90, Lear arrives and learns that Regan and Cornwall refuse to see him; in the folio he says:

Deny to speak with me? They are sick? They are weary?
They have travell'd all the night?

In the quarto 'all the night' appears as 'hard to-night.' The time scheme is confused in this play, as in *Othello*, and would be still more so without the folio corrections. In the quarto it would appear that Kent and Oswald arrive in the evening and Lear early next morning; this clashes with what follows (Sc. iv, line 303 'The night comes on') and the time for both may very well have been set back in revision.

But for this possible instance, the quarto text appears to have been left untouched—not a line blotted—and the revision practically confined to making omissions and additions. From the nature of the added passages we see its purpose and scope: they are explanatory, to intensify the dramatic effect, and sometimes to strike a far deeper note. As examples of this last we may note Lear's tenderness to the fool, his pathetic desire for sleep (III, iv, 26, 27), the fool's consciousness of death (III, vi, 92), Gloucester's resignation (v, ii, 11), Goneril's scorn ('An interlude!' v, iii, 88), and finally the shock which kills Lear, intense joy for intense pain (v, iii, 310). There is everywhere improvement.

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