

## The Text of *King Lear* 2.2.136-145 in the 'Arden 3' Edition

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### GLOUCESTER

Let me beseech your grace not to do so.

<sup>Q</sup>His fault is much, and the good King, his master,  
Will check him for't. Your purposed low correction  
Is such as basest and contemnedst wretches  
For pilferings and most common trespasses  
Are punished with.<sup>Q</sup>

140

The King, <sup>F</sup>his master, needs <sup>F</sup>must take it ill  
That he, so slightly valued in his messenger,  
Should have him thus restrained.

### CORNWALL

I'll answer that.

145

I quote this passage from the latest Arden edition ('Arden 3') of *King Lear*, by R.A. Foakes (Walton-on-Thames: Nelson, 1997). It results from conflation of relevant material found in the main primary sources for the play: the 1608 Quarto (Q) and the 1623 Folio (F). Upon reading the passage as here presented, I felt that Shakespeare could not possibly have approved of it had he been alive today. My objection is not to the fact of conflation as such, but to *this* conflation. My purpose in this paper is to consider the nature of Foakes's approach and how the passage may be improved so as to bring it closer to what Shakespeare is likely to have written, assuming that he wrote at least one intelligible version. As well, I shall move beyond this passage to some wider considerations of Q, F, and Foakes's text.

### The Passage

Let us be clear that what Foakes produces, here and throughout his edition, is, in essence, a conflation of the two main primary texts, Q and F, which even people from widely different camps recognise as significantly Shakespearean. Foakes's decision to conflate the texts shows that we have come a long way since Jay L. Halio edited *The Tragedy of King Lear* for Cambridge University Press in 1992. At that time, the so-called 'two-text theory' – which rejected conflation as illegitimate – was so fashionable as to be almost unquestioned. To give an idea of the heady revolutionism of those now strangely distant times, and the comparative conservatism of Foakes's approach, I cannot think of a better way than to quote the first paragraph from Halio's edition in full:

For over two hundred years editors of *King Lear* have based their work on the theory that the two early texts of the play, the first quarto of 1608 and the Folio of 1623, represent incomplete and faulty approximations of the play as Shakespeare originally wrote it. This single-text theory, so-called, is in the judgements of many scholars today no longer viable. In their view, an alternative theory – that Q and F (as they are known) represent different versions of the play – must replace it. These scholars believe that the quarto, poorly printed by Nicholas Okes's compositors in the winter of 1607-8, derives from

an early manuscript copy in Shakespeare's hand, and that the Folio derives from a considerably altered and revised version, one more closely approximating the play as the author visualised it in performance, or as the King's Men actually staged it in the period between its first performances and the third decade of the seventeenth century. (Preface, p.xiii)

Believing that editors should now follow either Q or F (and certainly not conflate), Halio based his text on F (though occasionally he did admit a reading from Q into his F text).

Of late, the pendulum has markedly swung back to the 'single-text theory', on which all editors for over two centuries had so very indefensibly based their texts. To my mind the best – and totally clinching – attack on the 'two-text theory' is contained in an article that probably came too late for Foakes to use it, *viz.* Sidney Thomas's 'The Integrity of *King Lear*'.<sup>1</sup> Thomas is 'concerned to affirm the integrity, the oneness of *King Lear* as a coherent vision of life and human relationships. There are not two *Lears*, or as some would have it, an indefinite number of possible *Lears*, but one supreme masterpiece' (p.384). I believe that Thomas's article makes its case, demolishing every single claim in favour of the so-called two-text theory, and at the same time imposingly resurrecting the one-text theory.

It is as an edition based on the one-text theory that Foakes's text must ultimately stand or fall, and as will be plain I commend him in principle for attempting to conflate Q and F in an effort to find, as earlier editors had done, the 'one' text of which Q and F are, to use Halio's words, 'incomplete and faulty approximations'.

But, if we are allowed to conflate again, the question must be, at all times: which conflation is likely to be closest to the text (and I do agree with those who feel that ultimately one can speak of *the* text) which Shakespeare wrote? And it is because Foakes does not seem to me to conflate Q and F well, in 2.2.136-145 of his edition, that I have quoted that passage above, and will now proceed to discuss it, exposing what seems to me at fault with Foakes's version of the passage, and what conflation should replace it.

Foakes's use of superscript <sup>Q</sup> and <sup>F</sup> indicates which passages, incorporated in his text, have been taken uniquely from the one primary source or the other. Where superscript is not used, the two sources are in substantive agreement. An advantage of this method is that the reader is, in many cases, allowed to see at a glance just what Foakes's procedure has been in arriving at his (modernised) text. Thus, here, we can observe that the following passage is unique to Q:

His fault is much, and the good King, his master,  
Will check him for't. Your purposed low correction  
Is such as basest and contemnedst wretches  
For pilferings and most common trespasses  
Are punished with. 140

On the other hand, in the next line (143), 'his master, needs' has been taken from F. The remainder of the material is shared by the two sources.

1. *The Modern Language Review*, 90, 1995, pp.572-84. For references to other discussions than those mentioned in this paper, see Foakes's edition, which both lists and discusses many.

It is Foakes's determination to derive 'his master needs' from F that, I think, causes the speech to be quite unsatisfactory. In line 142, Foakes has an odd 'half-line'. More seriously, Gloucester is presented as engaged in inane repetition, having spoken in line 138 about 'the good king, his master', and now, here, about 'the King, his master'. Furthermore, 'needs' does not actually add anything.

What is Shakespeare likely to have written? Surely the passage is greatly improved if we omit the words unique to F, and add what remains of line 143 to 'Are punished with' in line 142. We thus get 'Are punished with. The King must take it ill', which is a perfect iambic pentameter, and gets rid of the totally superfluous 'his master, needs' as well as the unconvincing 'Are punished with' as a half-line.

If we had just *one* text, with the format that Foakes presents, a thoughtful editor would be sorely tempted to engage in the cutting and pasting I have just practised. But, in fact, we have *two* texts, and what I have done is nothing other than follow Q throughout the passage, rejecting an unnecessary, disfiguring addition (if that is what it is) from F. And it seems to me that no case can be made for F being so superior to Q that we must follow it wherever we can, i.e. – in this case – accepting lines 138-42 from Q and then suddenly switching to F as though that automatically has greater authority.

What, it is interesting to speculate, actually happened to this passage in the early seventeenth century? I submit that Shakespeare originally wrote something like the following:

Glost. Let me beseech your Grace not to doe so,  
His fault is much, and the good King his maister  
Will check him for't, your purpost low correction  
Is such, as basest and [con]temne[d]st wretches [140]  
For pilfrings and most common trespasses  
Are punisht with. The King must take it ill,  
That hee [...] so slightly valued in his messenger,  
Should haue him thus restrained.  
Duke. Ile answer that.

This is the passage in Q, which I have, however, significantly re-lined. As well, I accept that Q's *temnest* must be emended to *contemnedst*, which Foakes prints; and where Q has, in line 143, *hee's*, I agree that that must be *hee*, indicating my omission of 's by including [...]. To be perfectly clear about the nature of what I have done, I quote the passage as it actually appears in one copy of Q, the Gorhambury copy:<sup>2</sup>

Glost. Let me beseech your Grace not to doe so,  
His fault is much, and the good King his maister  
Will check him for't, your purpost low correction  
Is such, as basest and temnest wretches for pilfrings [140]  
And most common trespasses are punisht with,  
The King must take it ill, that hee's so slightly valued  
In his messenger, should haue him thus restrained.  
Duke. Ile answer that.

2. See the facsimile edition, *King Lear, 1608 (Pied Bull Quarto)*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939.

This is what the passage became in F:<sup>3</sup>

*Glo.* Let me beseech your Grace, not to do so,  
The King his Master, needs must take it ill  
That he so slightly valued in his Messenger,  
Should haue him thus restrained.  
*Cor.* Ile answere that.

We may imagine that the people working on F used a source like the 'putative reconstruction' above which I have, chiefly through re-lining, derived from Q (which scholars believe was also used itself, along with Q2). Thus line 137 as it appears in the reconstruction was preserved for F. After that, 'His fault ... with' (138-42) was cut. In my putative version, this left the remainder of line 142, 'The King must take it ill', hanging loose as an incomplete line. No doubt it was felt to be desirable to point out in F (as had happened in Q) that the King was Kent's master. Hence line 142 became a new line, the one that now appears in F, viz. 'The King his Master, needs must take it ill'. The remainder of the passage was left substantively the same.

We can see, though, that the text in F, while it omits a good deal of value, is intrinsically a better text than that found in Q. The problem of *bee's* is not encountered in F, which has the obviously correct *be*. As well, the prosodic arrangement of F is superior: while 'The King his Master, needs must take it ill' was obviously constructed for the occasion, it is equally obvious that what follows is prosodically correct, as 'That he so slightly valued in his Messenger' is a complete iambic line, and the next pentameter is made up of 'Should haue him thus restrained' plus 'Ile answere that'. Thus an editor who primarily bases a modernised text on Q is considerably aided in this process by the passage as found in F. That does not mean, of course, that it is either necessary or desirable to do what Foakes does, i.e. print lines 137-142 (in his edition) from Q, and then switch to F for the remainder of the passage. Rather, the text should here in essence be based on Q.

### Wider Considerations

Analysis of this passage and issues related to it confirms two important impressions which hold good for much of both Q and F. F, though often truncated, is fairly directly based on a high quality text, most probably one altered for performance, but at times insensitively so. In the present instance, the lines unique to Q supply important information about the use of stocks as a punishment for 'base' people which F unfortunately omits. However, although the original text can be easily enough restored, here, from Q, Q is in many ways remarkably slovenly. Foakes speaks of 'the commonly accepted theory that Q was derived from Shakespeare's "foul papers"' (p.157). But this theory is by no means universally accepted, and I do not think that it should be. Rather, the nature of Q suggests that a good deal of it was the result of some form of 'memorial reconstruction'. As Thomas puts it, after surveying (pertinently and intelligently) a large amount of relevant evidence: "The various Q errors that I have cited, mishearings, omissions, mispunctuation, mislineation, are all char-

3. I quote from the excellent facsimile edition edited by Sidney Lee for the Clarendon Press (Oxford, 1902), which is based on the Chatsworth copy. Not only is Lee's facsimile based on just *one* copy of F, but, most significantly, it is exceptionally legible and clear.

acteristic features of so-called "bad" quartos, texts that have long been considered the products of memorial reconstruction ... there are many clear errors of a sort that can only be due to some form of oral transmission, and that are difficult to reconcile with the hypothesis of an authentic Shakespeare manuscript as the copy for Q' (p.583). Nor, as Thomas is well aware, is this a unique or new view. I quote W.W. Greg about Q, writing about half a century ago:

All the stigmas of reporting from stage-representation are there: actors' connectives and expansions, perversions and vulgarizations, anticipations and recollections and assimilations, breakdowns and improvisations. There is no ignoring this evidence, and its significance is now generally admitted.<sup>4</sup>

Obviously, an editor using Q needs to be careful and wary, but that does not mean that we cannot use it to restore the text, and the passage we have considered obviously should be based on Q, though F helps us in establishing an improved version of what Q preserves. In this instance, I think that Foakes is unwise to print part of the passage from F. In other cases, however, he appears to me far too ready to rely on Q when that shows clear traits of memorial reconstruction rather than Shakespearean authenticity. I put side by side a number of lines from Kenneth Muir's earlier Arden edition,<sup>5</sup> and their counterparts in Foakes's. The to my mind spurious words are indicated by Foakes's use of superscript <sup>Q</sup>:

Muir: Sir, I love you more than word can wield the matter (I.i.54)

Foakes: Sir, I <sup>Q</sup>do<sup>Q</sup> love you more than word can wield the matter (I.i.55)

Foakes's *do* is clearly hypermetrical and serves no useful function whatever.

Muir: I am made of that self metal as my sister (I.i.68)

Foakes: <sup>Q</sup>Sir<sup>Q</sup> I am made of that self mettle as my sister (1.1.69)

Much the same can be said about this example as the previous one. Very likely, if the line is based on an actor's memory, the use of *Sir* here is merely an unwarranted echo of its occurrence in line 55. In fact, if we look at the totality of Q's statement rather than just *Sir* which Foakes adds to F's line, the impression of memorial reconstruction is much reinforced, for the 'line' in Q is 'Sir I am made of the selfe same mettall that my sister is'. It is difficult to see why Foakes has decided to add *Sir* (and no more) to F's perfectly metrical line, or, conversely, why he rejected the remainder of the Q version.

Muir: Than that conferr'd on Goneril. Now, our joy (I.i.81)

Foakes: Than that conferred on Goneril.—<sup>Q</sup>But<sup>Q</sup> now our joy (1.1.82)

Again *But* is hypermetrical; it reads like an addition by an enthusiastic actor remembering the line imperfectly or 'improving' the speech.

Muir: Nothing will come of nothing: speak again (I.i.89)

Foakes: <sup>Q</sup>How,<sup>Q</sup> nothing will come of nothing. Speak again (1.1.90)

Q's hypermetrical addition of *How* is probably due to an actor adding it as a result of his memory of Lear's next speech, which starts with 'How' (line 93 in Muir, 94 in Foakes).

4. *The Shakespeare First Folio: Its Bibliographical and Textual History*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1955, p.380.

5. *King Lear*, London: Methuen, 1952; corr. ed. 1972.

These four examples will have to serve, but they are representative of many others in Foakes's text. We can thus see that while in the case of Gloucester's speech Foakes adds material from F which is better omitted by following Q, the reverse happens in these hypermetrical lines: in each case the line is better in F, but Foakes unaccountably adds material from Q.

It is ironic that Foakes's edition returns to the process of conflation of Q and F, but in a way which is still far from satisfying. His text is more valuable than Halio's because that, based on F, made us acutely aware of how much good Q material we were deprived; but I would predict that before long it will be realised that on the whole the text found in older editions like that of Muir and many others pre-dating the great debate on the two-text theory has served us extremely well, and that conservative modern editors like David Bevington have been quite right to continue to offer the public that 'received' version as most likely to be very close to what Shakespeare would like us to know.<sup>6</sup> To return to the passage to which this article is centrally devoted, I now invite the reader to compare Foakes's version with that presented by Muir, which I quote below:

*Glou.* Let me beseech your Grace not to do so.  
 His fault is much, and the good King his master  
 Will check him for't: your purpos'd low correction  
 Is such as basest and contemned'st wretches  
 For pilfrings and most common trespasses [140]  
 Are punish'd with: the King must take it ill,  
 That he, so slightly valued in his messenger,  
 Should have him thus restrained.

*Corn.* I'll answer that.

The colons are perhaps not ideal; David Bevington uses full stops instead.<sup>7</sup> But that is not an important difference. In either text, we have, I am convinced, something more authentically Shakespearean than we find in Foakes's, where Gloucester twice refers to the King as Kent's master, or Halio's, which offers us the obviously incomplete version found in F.

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6. See Bevington's *Complete Works of Shakespeare*, 4th ed., New York: Harper Collins, 1992.

7. Other influential editions, too, offer substantively the same text as Muir's: for example, George Ian Duthie & John Dover Wilson, eds., *King Lear*, Cambridge: Univ. Press, 1968; G.K. Hunter, ed., *King Lear*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972; E.A. Horsman, ed. *The Tragedy of King Lear*, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973; G. Blakemore Evans, gen. ed., *The Tragedy of King Lear*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974; M.H. Abrams, gen. ed., *King Lear*, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 6th ed., vol. 1, New York: Norton, 1993. All of these editions offer a conflation of Q and F, as has been the custom until very recently, but they all avoid Foakes's curious F-derived 'his master, needs'. Moreover, in the case of the four hypermetrical lines which I cite from Foakes's edition as examples (1)-(4) all of the other editions are substantively in tune with Muir's, except that in the case of example (2) the Norton anthology follows Q, reading 'Sir, I am made / Of the self-same metal that my sister is', which, though wordier and less metrical than F's pentameter, is at least more consistent and less patently unmetrical than the quite unnecessary conflation offered by Foakes.