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## Reuniting King Lear. (Book review)

**Reuniting King Lear. (Book review).** Barroll, Leeds. *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 30. (Jan 1, 2017): p183(5). (2386 words).

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The One King Lear, by Sir Brian Vickers. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2016. Pp. xxiv + 387. Hardback. \$45.00.

The first quarto of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, published in 1608 (Q1), omits many lines present in the text of the play that appears in the First Folio of 1623 (F). But the quarto, the only *Lear* text published in Shakespeare's lifetime (a "Pavier" quarto, 1619, derives from Q1), also contains a number of lines not present in F. Further, the character-attributions at the end of Q1 and F differ: in Q1, the Duke of Albany speaks the play's last four lines as the putative ruler of England, while in F, Edgar speaks them. From these and other typographical disparities between the two texts, the notion has arisen that *King Lear* actually survives in two versions, with the Folio text representing Shakespeare's rewriting of his original play. According to this view, in F Shakespeare deliberately departed from the Q1 text, cutting lines from it and adding others, making minor revisions and regularizing entrances and exits, and introducing a conceptual change by assigning the final four lines to the character of Edgar--all of which combine to produce a different play. Indeed, this idea of two extant versions has defined the approach adopted by the editors of the Oxford Shakespeare, whose presentation of both texts in their edition influenced the editors of the Norton Complete Works to follow suit. Thus, little by little, the notion of Shakespeare's great tragedy surviving in two versions has, by virtue of the prestige of both these publishing houses, become almost canonical, the "second" *King Lear* becoming authoritative as the dramatist's final revision of his earlier work.

In *The One King Lear*, however, Brian Vickers argues that this dualism is scarcely borne out by the Q and F texts themselves, and he advances quite different claims about the relationship of Quarto to Folio. His first claim is that Q1, rather than being an earlier version of the tragedy, is actually a text truncated by the printer, Nicholas Okes, who, in effect, was handicapped by his lack of printing experience with play quartos. Because Okes wrongly calculated the amount of paper that he would need for the entire printing job, he was forced to employ a wide assortment of space-saving devices in setting the source text into type. These included the compression of text and spacing and the omission of phrases and even whole lines.

Vickers' second, and complementary claim necessarily has to do with the nature of the *Lear* Folio text, the supposed second "version" of the tragedy, and its relationship to Q1. He identifies F *Lear* as a theatrical text originating in the author's manuscript, a manuscript that underwent two stages of alteration "by other hands." First, the book-keeper of the King's Servants, for theatrical purposes, "made several drastic and ill-judged cuts, pursuing an

unknowable policy of abbreviation." Second, working with this performance-text, Jaggard's First Folio editors modernized Shakespeare's grammar, "regularized" his prosody, and substituted many of their own linguistic preferences. They then also proceeded to abridge this text. Thus, both Q1 and F, printed fifteen years apart, are imperfect texts representing a single version of Lear variously worked over.

I have sketched Vickers' conclusions at the outset because such an argument, though easily stated, has body only if substantiated by a rigorous methodology addressing in detail the natures of both Lear texts. Thus what is important about this study is that its three hundred and eighty-three pages can readily serve as a model for future work not only on Lear, but on any Folio plays for which we have prior quartos. Although space here does not permit extended comment on the evidence that Vickers' discussion entails, what follows may suggest the foundations of his argument.

Vickers devotes his first four chapters to the 1608 quarto, and he begins by reviewing, for a variety of prospective readers, the current state of scholarship on the routines and mechanics of early modern printing. But he quickly moves to an extended analysis of Q1, buttressed by his ancillary and detailed Appendix 2. In this appendix, Vickers tabulates every page of the quarto, first counting the number of its typographical adjustments (e.g., the substitution of "&" for "and"), and then its five kinds of text adjustments (e.g., verse into prose); in a final column he tallies the number of lines saved on each page through these devices.

As indicated earlier, Vickers points out that Nicholas Okes created his own space problem in Q1 by miscalculating the ratio of paper to text. As is generally known, producing a quarto quire (that is, a gathering of four leaves printed on each side) entailed setting type so that pages 1, 4, 5, and 8 could be set in the so-called outer forme for imposition, and pages 2, 3, 6, and 7 in the inner forme. When printed, the type from the outer forme appeared on one side of the printed sheet, and that from the inner forme on the other: after the printed sheet had been folded twice, the pages appeared in sequence. Thus the quarto compositors] needed to "cast off" in advance the pages of the manuscript copy--to mark the places where he calculated that each printed page was to begin and end so the correct pages could be set from forme to forme. But the manuscript source for Q1 Lear was not cast off.

Vickers cites Peter Blayney's important and exhaustive work describing how the Q1 Lear was initially approached by Okes, and then by his compositors. As Blayney demonstrates, Okes purchased ten-and-a-half sheets for the Lear printing, a half-sheet for the preliminaries and ten sheets for the text, with the final page blank. But unlike Okes, London printers who were experienced in printing plays usually allowed at least eleven whole sheets for an entire play. Thus from the beginning Okes' miscalculation required spacesaving in the formes. Further, because the original manuscript might have been difficult to read, or for some other reason, Okes decided not to set type by formes but instead to set it seriatim, by page. Had the manuscript copy been cast off, the compositors would have set type for an entire forme at one time, that is, for four pages. Knowing what was supposed to be in pages 1, 4, 5, and 8 of the outer forme, they could have printed this forme on the requisite number of sheets, and then redistributed the type used for the outer forme to set up the inner forme, pages 2, 3, 6, and 7. But when the Q1 compositors set type from page to page, they had to have two formes before them simultaneously, first setting type for page 1 in forme I, and then setting type for pages 2 and 3 in forme II, returning to forme I to set type for pages 4 and 5, and so on. In effect, as far as page-planning and type-allocation were concerned, the compositors, tying up twice as much type as the alternative method would have required, and never clear on how much

space was ultimately going to be available in their formes, seem to have been "making it up as they went along."

The effects of this situation, Vickers points out, can be seen on every page of Q1 (ch. 4). Not only is the printing cramped or crowded, but "the inaccurate page estimate caused Okes's compositors to take the most drastic measure of all: omitting more than a hundred of Shakespeare's lines" (p. 75). Thus, Vickers argues, passages present in F but missing from Q1 do not necessarily indicate that the quarto itself was a separate and earlier version of the play; rather, they represent omissions effected by Okes not only to remedy miscalculations, but to save paper.

How then does the Folio text relate to this situation? In Chapter 5, Vickers approaches the problem from two directions, querying first the nature of the source text for F, and, secondly, the way in which this text was redacted by the Folio editors. In determining the nature of the source text, Vickers invokes the Hand D fragment of the Sir Thomas More manuscript. Now thought to be Shakespeare's, the spelling and penmanship in Hand D can serve as a kind of template for determining whether copy for the 1608 Quarto was also in Shakespeare's hand, or at least seems evocative of Hand D, Vickers marshals the work of many scholars, including Giles Dawson, Madeleine Doran, A. W. Pollard, J. Dover Wilson and, more recently, Jay Halio, as the basis for concluding that both the Q1 and F versions of *Lear* share characteristics of the Hand D spelling and penmanship (pp. 174-80). Thus, supported by these findings as well as his own, Vickers argues that the Q1 text was probably set from the author's foul papers, and that the same can be said for the the source copy for F.

As regards F, it has been generally assumed that given the theatrical provenance of the First Folio itself, the source text for *Lear* must itself be theatrical in character. This "Booke" of the play, in turn, is usually thought of not as the author's manuscript, but as a fair or clean copy of the text executed by a professional scribe for use in the playhouse. But Vickers points out that the work of William Long, and, most recently, of Paul Werstine, refutes the rationale for this view. Werstine's revolutionary study of the nineteen surviving theatrical manuscripts and the three quartos annotated for stage production shows that playhouse texts are often unreliable with respect to stagecraft, such as stage directions and character-designations; moreover, these texts "sport the loose ends, false starts, unresolved conclusions, and alternative passages of dialogue once thought peculiar to authorial texts" (pp. 180 ff.). In this connection, Vickers also notes Pollard's observation that plays were regularly printed from authorial manuscripts which the "book-holder" had used for theatrical performance, as well as Doran's demonstration that both the 1608 *Lear* Quarto and the Folio derived from the same authorial copy (p. 187). Thus he argues that there is good reason "to look for signs of an author's continuing presence, such as those found in F, in plays printed from a theatrical manuscript." Indeed, Vickers concludes that the text purchased by Okes from the King's Men in 1607 "was the complete authorial draft imperfectly preserved in the 1608 Quarto" (p. 199), and that the text delivered by the King's Men to Isaac Jaggard in 1622 derived from the same manuscript, "probably with alterations made by the company for theatrical performance."

In addition to identifying the Folio source text as "a complete authorial draft" configured for theatrical production, Vickers sees it as further altered by editorial emendations. (Ch. 6) He provides evidence that the F editors took pains to impose their own grammatical preferences, as well as their own linguistic and stylistic preferences, even in places changing the word order as compared to that of Q1. Thus, Vickers argues, a fundamental difference between Q1 and Folio is that while the Quarto "reproduces Shakespeare's manuscript, designed for

acting," the Folio presents "a theatrical text for readers." Really, it is not so much "theatrical" as "post-theatrical." (p. 205)

This post-theatrical text was not only "corrected" by the Folio editors, the author continues, but it was also abridged (ch.7). Calling attention to W. P. Williams's observations on the subject, Vickers notes that the changes an abridger makes will differ from those effected by a compositor. A compositor who omits material either on purpose or from error deals with a space limited by the seven or eight lines held by his composing stick, while an abridger, with the whole manuscript before him, can take a more organized approach. Thus Vickers finds missing from the abridged Lear of the Folio text not words or phrases, but whole passages that had appeared in the 1608 Quarto. There are fifty-four such omissions (including all of 4.3.), seven of them involving more than ten lines: for example, forty lines cut from 3.6., Lear's imaginary trial scene. Because they do not substantially damage either our understanding of individual characters or of the play's overall design, the large number of such cuts suggests conscious abridgment. Even so, "other, far less significant scenes were left untouched, for reasons that we can only guess at." (p. 265).

Vickers concludes with discussion of the development of the two-version theory of Lear launched by Michael Warren in 1968, elaborated in 1980 by Steven Urkowitz and showcased in a specially commissioned volume, *The Division of the Kingdoms*, edited by Gary Taylor and Michael Warren. Following the evolution of this theory, Vickers works systematically to dispose of the explicit and implicit arguments in support of it, including the idea that Shakespeare omitted passages from the Quarto in his Folio revision in order to change the characterization of Edgar and Albany (pp. 289-301). This familiar argument focuses on the different ways in which the tragedy ends after Albany says to Kent and Edgar: "Friends of my soul, you twain, / Rule in this kingdom and the gored state sustain." In Q1, as we have seen, Kent responds but Edgar does not, and the last four lines of the play ("The oldest have bom much" etc.) are given to "Duke," i.e., Albany. But F assigns these four final lines to Edgar, creating a supposedly equivocal response to the Duke's request, and compromising Albany's leadership. Vickers argues, I think persuasively, that erratic character-designations are often present in the Folio and, further, that "nothing is taken away from Albany": in both texts, it is he who gives all the final orders.

Vickers' study is a long-overdue and careful response to a situation in which the Folio text of Lear has generally come to be regarded, on insufficient evidence, as Shakespeare's revision of his tragedy. In the absence of any authorial manuscripts of King Lear, Vickers takes on this issue in the only way it is possible to do so: by a painstaking, thoroughgoing analysis of the early modern technology through which these works have survived. I suspect that Vickers' book will, for a long time, stand as a model for this kind of analysis, not only with Lear but also with the other First Folio plays published in quarto before 1623.

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