

Promised End

The Last Scene of *King Lear*

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By

Sherman Hawkins

For

Anne

Seth, Katherine, and Daniel

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



Promised End: The Last Scene of *King Lear*

By Sherman Hawkins

Edited by Seth C. Hawkins, Daniel H. Hawkins and Katherine L. Hawkins

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PRAISE FOR SHERMAN HAWKINS

“Few new books on Shakespeare—and indeed on literature in general—are likely to excite more pleasurable anticipation than this one by Sherman Hawkins.”

—Michael Goldman, Professor Emeritus of English, Princeton University; author of *Shakespeare and the Energies of Drama, Acting and Action in Shakespearean Tragedy*, and *On Drama: Boundaries of Genre, Borders of Self*

“Invariably brilliant and moving.”

—Arthur Kirsch, Professor Emeritus of English, University of Virginia; author of *The Passions of Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes* and *Shakespeare and the Experience of Love*

“One of the most charismatic teachers who ever graced an academic setting... I'm immensely grateful that Sherman's *magnum opus*, this penetrating analysis of *King Lear*, will finally appear in print. When I had the opportunity to look at an early draft of this remarkable study several years ago, my first thought was how sorry I was that I hadn't had the good fortune to read it before I produced my *Everyman* edition of Shakespeare's most memorable tragedy in 1993. I'm confident that others will feel the same exhilaration that came over me as I made my way through *The Promised End*. It provides one reminder after another of the insight, wit, and eloquence that Sherman always brought to his conversations, his lectures, and the classes he conducted with such eloquence and generosity.”

—John Andrews, founder, The Shakespeare Guild; trustee, Shakespeare Association of America; author of *William Shakespeare: His World, His Work, His Influence*; author, *Shakespeare's World and Work*; editor, *The Guild Shakespeare*; editor, *The Everyman Shakespeare*

"Careful and deep... Sherman Hawkins has a rare ability to look at Shakespeare's most brilliant comedies and see their deep interconnections in sensibility and outlook. He looked at the world that Shakespeare's work creates and saw it whole."

—Gail Kern Paster, director, Folger Shakespeare Library; editor, *Shakespeare Quarterly*; author of *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream: Texts and Contexts*, and *The Idea of the City in the Age of Shakespeare*

"He has a keen understanding equally of Shakespeare's works as poetic artifacts, as dramatic narratives, and as performative scripts, and is equally at home in the classroom and on the boards. It seems utterly fitting that he should have capped his astounding career in the double gesture of playing Lear with unflinching honesty, seeing feelingly the character in its devastating fullness, and explicating *Lear* with unyielding persistence, bringing fresh clarity to the play's compelling darkness."

—Kimberly Benston, President and Francis B. Gummere Professor of English, Haverford College

"No one has inhabited Shakespeare more intimately—as teacher and actor as well as scholar—than Sherman Hawkins."

—Lawrence Danson, Professor Emeritus of English, Princeton University; editor of *On King Lear*, author of *Tragic Alphabet: Shakespeare's Drama of Language*, *The Harmonies of The Merchant of Venice*, and *Shakespeare's Dramatic Genre*

"Sherman Hawkins is one of the moral and intellectual models whom I've tried to emulate throughout my career, and in much of my life outside my career. His ideas changed lives simply by telling the truth."

—Edward Mendelson, literary executor of the Estate of W.H. Auden; Professor of English and Comparative Literature and Lionel Trilling Professor in the Humanities, Columbia University.

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FOREWORD

KATHERINE L. HAWKINS,
DANIEL H. HAWKINS,
SETH C. HAWKINS

The Harrisburg Shakespeare Company's King Lear... offered one of the most memorable encounters I have had not only with King Lear but with Shakespeare in performance, largely because of the lead, Sherman Hawkins... Although a septuagenarian, he seemed "Every inch a king," displaying the intensity of a man who has spent a lifetime holding on to his throne by force of will. At the same time, Hawkins exhibited vulnerability, reminding us that—whatever his title—he was ultimately "a poor old man, / As full of grief as age; wretched in both." Through Hawkins's unified portrayal, the audience could glimpse the former Lear—powerful yet capricious—and understand how this tragedy was set in motion many years ago. Hawkins's consistency also made Lear's final confrontation with the consequences of his rash choices all the more poignant... [in the] harsh and beautiful truths of the final scene.... Alongside Hawkins in "this tough world," other cast members performed with vigor and intelligence. All rose to the caliber of the lead. In the show's notes, the cast-representative reports how Hawkins inspired everyone: "If a 77-year-old man could... give that much of himself to the character of Lear, then we could put that much and more into our performances. Sherman was a blessing."¹

Our father is better known as a scholar than as an actor. In the words of Shakespeare professor Lawrence Danson, "No one has written more elegantly and inventively about Shakespeare's comedies and histories, and no one has inhabited Shakespeare more intimately, than Sherman Hawkins." We know what he means. His way of living into the text animates his scholarship, as this book reveals.

In the final scene of the production reviewed above, whose "harsh and beautiful truths" are the topic of *Promised End*, a stagehand in plain view of the audience placed the body of Cordelia into Lear's arms. It was

¹ Sloboda, Noel. 2012. "King Lear, Harrisburg Shakespeare Company, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 2006." *Shakespeare Bulletin* 30 (1): 69–71.

only at this moment that our father's age became obvious; at 77, he was strong enough to carry her but not strong enough to pick her up. Nothing could have conveyed more clearly the fusion of kingliness, mortality, and community necessary to his interpretation of *Lear* as a tragedy that enacts, in its audience and readers, its own theme of redemptive, self-abnegating love. We recognize something like this theme in the words of those who knew him as a teacher or colleague, and in our own experience of him as a father. And so this foreword risks a similar break in the fourth wall: we hope that view of the backstage scene will reinforce the interpretive work his book undertakes.

Dad grew up one of four brothers in Walpole, Massachusetts during the Great Depression. When he was 5, his mother died. His father, our grandfather, elected to keep the family together and raise the boys as a single parent rather than send them to the care of extended relatives, as would have been expected at the time. He instead hired a helper, Ms. Mathews, to watch them while he worked at Kendall Mills. When he came home from work, he feigned enthusiasm for hot dogs, the family's staple dinner, providing an early model for the power of even small acts of loving imagination. Our father, meanwhile, turned to books, immersing himself in the worlds of *Treasure Island*, *Swallows & Amazons*, and *Beau Geste*. His recourse to the imaginary developed, through a growing mastery of the written word, into a powerful means of navigating reality. Although our grandfather never went to college, our father earned a Pepsi-Cola Scholarship to attend Harvard and continued to Oxford on a Fulbright Fellowship, where he studied with the likes of JRR Tolkien and CS Lewis. He then earned his PhD and began a teaching career at Princeton. He would squirm at the notion of bringing the personal into the critical, and by introducing these biographical details in this foreword, we are aware that we are placing him, like Hamlet, in the position of "acting in a play within a play that is not of his own devising" (p. 28). But as in *Hamlet*, it is in service of a higher purpose. Perhaps Dad's imagination-fueled progress from Depression-era Walpole to the august halls of academia help explain how, in his language, "imaginary" does not mean "fictive as opposed to real" but "real because imagined" (p. 17).

His charisma, critical acumen, playfulness, and genius for infusing the real with the imaginative made for an electrifying force not only onstage and in the classroom, but also around the family dinner table. His everyday dialogue is peppered with Shakespeare, breaking ordinary conversation to shout, "WHAT? My foot my tutor?" One of Seth and Katy's most treasured memories is serving, while young children and before Daniel was born, as sprites in a Wesleyan University production of *The Tempest* in which Dad

played Prospero. He reprised this role both in his final Shakespeare class at Wesleyan, and, years later, as part of Katy's wedding ceremony. For his students, fellow actors, and children alike, Dad could, in his own words about Lear, "intensify his own imaginings" to create "an empathy that enables [others] to feel what he feels" and "to communicate his poetic faith" (p. 242). "By his focus, his concentration, the intensity of his emotion," he enabled us all to "see feelingly—to see with the eye of imagination, the heart, even perhaps the soul" (p. 244). Importantly, the sight he inspired in others was trained through, not on, himself. As he writes of the "project of the critic and interpreter," his purpose has always been "to focus on the human without losing a sense of its higher or deeper figurative meaning" (p. 146). The love for him that shines through our words here or the observations quoted above—or from the dedication to him of the Princeton undergraduate yearbook the year he departed their faculty—doesn't reflect a cult of personality. It instead acknowledges the human example of someone who knew about loss and lack, and yet embodied an intensity of love oriented outside and beyond the self.

The same distinctive combination of playful imagination and massive personal investment that animated his parenting, acting, and teaching also led to a general unwillingness to ever call his own written work finished—aiming "always for that ideal completeness that allures even as it eludes us" (p. 33). So when he decided that his retirement project would be a book on Lear, we all anxiously wondered where his decision would lead. This was his favorite play, the "greatest play" (p. 6)—to do it justice, his book would need to reveal Shakespeare's objective in "the most momentous revision in all literature," in order to "see the object as it really is" (p. 21): redemptive rather than catastrophic. A task of this proportion required him "scrutinize all its aspects, both theatrical and literary—staging and acting and audience response together with theme, plot structure, character, symbolism, imagery, style—the list goes on indefinitely." He admits that such a critical lens is "humanly impossible," since "ideally the practitioner of this synthetic analysis should be master of all the techniques it deploys," (p. 32) but that recognition didn't prevent him from trying.

Our mother Anne, herself a professor of medical humanities, helped him complete the first manuscript draft, while Daniel stored digital transcripts of his handwritten pages. In 2012, after several years of work, Dad embarked on a major overhaul of the text, at which point Mom, in her wisdom, politely bowed out of the project. Katy took over, helping him wrangle a coherent revision from an increasingly unwieldy collection of documents. His progress slowed following a diagnosis of cancer and then a stroke that left him blind in one eye. As the "strings of life / began to crack"

(p. 44), he seemed to reconcile himself to the notion that the kingdom that was this book was not to be realized.

As Dad approached his 90th birthday, Seth came up with the idea of editing and resubmitting the manuscript ourselves. Seth spearheaded this process, working closely with Cambridge Scholars and with Katy and Daniel to prepare the manuscript for publication. While we've occasionally made editorial decisions to reconcile multiple versions of certain passages, we've endeavored to cleave as closely as possible to our father's work, and have added no additional material.² Our efforts simultaneously complete, intervene in, and extend his project. Our most obvious intervention is simply to call it finished—if he won't, we (and Cambridge Scholars) will!—and have obtained his enthusiastic support to do so. We also extend the book's key theoretical concept of enactment. Dad explicitly marks his identification with Lear when he introduces his project as “an old man's book about an even older man” (p. 1). The questions that follow about death, redemption, learning, blindness, and power are palpably agonistic as well as analytical—the reader can feel him not only investigate but, echoing Danson, *inhabit* Lear. So when a stagehand aids him to carry Cordelia, or when his children intervene to help restore his scholarly throne, “the play within a play calls for other actors” and we are “drawn into and share Lear's [or our dad's] mental world” (p. 178); we enlist ourselves in a system of identification he has already named.

Accordingly, as both children and editors, we're not sure whether we are Kent aiding Lear, or Cordelia arriving armed on the shore, or—as it sometimes felt reconciling multiple appendices and chapter versions—a community of sufferers out on the blasted heath (p. 186)! On one level, such ambiguities don't really matter, so long as identification provokes the higher purpose Dad identifies for it: to spur the intertextual enactment of redemptive, self-abnegating emotional identification—love—that is the play's key theme. He maintains that when, at the end of the play, Lear gazes at his daughter,

“A single current of emotion connects the audience—spectator and reader alike—through the other characters on stage to the two still figures at its center. I do not know what to call this feeling except love. If this is so, then the play includes the audience in the enactment of its theme.” (p. 281)

The wider networks of enactment we articulate—linking not only actors, audiences, and readers, but also stagehands, writers, and children—

² As a result, there is no mention of relevant work published since he stopped working on the manuscript in 2012.

may not exactly match the specific “single current” of redemptive love that is so important to Dad. We are variously more receptive than he to the “elaborate theoretical systems fashionable today” (p. 121), not, hopefully, for their “fetishization of the indeterminate” (p. 13) but because they help us think through the complexities of our own experiences of both *Lear*—this play that kills all its women to redeem its King—and thus also *Promised End*. We suspect, perhaps against our father’s sensibilities, that new enactments bring new meanings, and that while these new meanings resonate with the themes of the generative original, they don’t simply recapitulate them. Just as *Lear* invites the audience into the enactment of its themes, our father has himself enacted those themes, in his own life, in our lives, and in this book, and added meaning to them.³ And our own interventions—editing and publishing this book, and writing this Foreword—expands the system of recursive enactments he originally identified in Shakespeare. Throughout, meaning and emotional identification layer atop the same original, intransigent questions: what to do with kings? How to love fathers? How to “make a good end” (p. 147) in the absence of any certain redemption (p. 124)?

We will be forever grateful to Dad for teaching us that a promised end to such problems requires us to “see feelingly” (pp. 192, 282), and thus to love. We believe his book is itself an enactment of precisely such love.

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³ ...in ways that often blurred the distinction between personal and professional life. When Katy sent Dad a paper she delivered at the Ohio Shakespeare Conference on feminist re-appropriations of Miranda, he sent her back a card with the inscription, “thus far I will boldly publish her: she bore a mind that envy could not but call fair.”

INTRODUCTION

Silence: Is't so? Why then say an old man can do somewhat.
(2 Henry IV 5.3.78-9)

This is an old man's book about an even older man. If I have not quite attained Lear's "fourscore and upward," I am pressing hard upon him. Indeed, I turned eighty at the end of the two years it took to finish a manuscript of this book. I never planned to write it, though I have loved *King Lear* virtually my whole life: I first read the play in high school; I taught it in three different universities; I have written essays and given lectures about it. I hope there may be some value in this summary account of what I have come to see and understand. But after thirty years of teaching *Lear*, I can no longer recall and distinguish the exact sources of my interpretation. So I cannot now hope to provide the complete bibliography, the extensive cross-references and precise acknowledgement that are proper to a serious scholarly study. Much that follows is inevitably the sort of commonplace that must serve as foundation for any newer reading, and I do not doubt that much of what seems novel to me has been anticipated in books and articles I was unable to consult. I began to write on an impulse some fifteen years after retiring from active teaching and scholarship, and my attempts to catch up with recent criticism have been hampered by the lack of a university library. Even so, I have found some of my favorite points stolen by other critics in advance: I have recorded some of these parallels, and I apologize for those I have missed.

I take heart from A. C. Bradley's words in his preface to *Shakespearean Tragedy*:

Anyone who writes on Shakespeare must owe much to his predecessors. Where I was conscious of a particular obligation, I have acknowledged it, but most of my reading of Shakespearean criticism was done many years ago, and I can only hope that I have not often reproduced as my own what belongs to another.

This from the Oxford Professor of Poetry, introducing what still seems to me the best book of Shakespearean criticism published in its century! In the eyes of many, that judgment will mark me as stubbornly old-fashioned, and so indeed I am—I first encountered Bradley as a teenager, about the

same time I read *Lear*. And needless to say, there have been countless changes and many genuine advances in Shakespeare criticism since Bradley wrote, and indeed since I first read him. Some of these are reflected in the pages that follow. But it would be impiety not to acknowledge this primary obligation. I can call to my defense a critic whom even now a half century later, no one would call outdated. In his chapter on “The Fool in *Lear*” in *The Structure of Complex Words*, William Empson writes:

Going back to Bradley after drafting my piece, I was struck by how much I had unconsciously borrowed from him, how much broader and more adequate to the play his whole treatment seemed than mine, and what an enormous amount he gets said in his apparently brief and leisurely talks.

If this was true for Empson, it is doubly true for me: my whole reading of *Lear* grows out of Bradley’s conception of the play as dramatizing the redemption of King Lear. Even my analysis of Lear’s final lines, though it contradicts Bradley, only takes his argument one step further.

While I cannot claim Bradley’s insight into character or Empson’s dazzling command of every type of ambiguity, I do approach *Lear* with a kind of experience not common among literary critics who discuss it: I have actually played the part. In fact, I have acted Lear twice. The first time was a staged reading performed by graduate students in English at the Theater Intime in Princeton around 1960. The second, nearly half a century later, was a production of the Shakespeare Festival of Harrisburg, in which a talented cast, directed by Clark Nicholson, played to an audience of some 2,000 people. I wish I could report that acting the King opened new and surprising vistas of interpretation for me. That was not the case, perhaps because studying, teaching, and writing about the play had made it seem so familiar to me.¹ But as I hope to show, the experience of acting the play has served as a useful check on other, more literary interpretations, and it has certainly deepened the way I feel about and understand certain scenes, speeches, and climactic moments, including the final ones.

¹ I wrote about *Lear* both near the beginning and at the end of my teaching, in “The Kingdoms and Trials of Love: Theology in *King Lear*,” *University: A Princeton Magazine* (Princeton, 1963-4), pp. 2-9, and in “Religious Patterning in Shakespeare’s Major Tragedies,” *Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences* (New Haven, 1991), pp. 155-88. I have drawn upon both these in the present discussion, as well as in a lengthy unpublished essay, “Edgar’s Delay, Gloucester’s Leap, Cordelia’s Death: Three Problems in Audience Response,” written for a meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America.

My engagement with the play thus encompasses both page and stage. Literary critics now are perhaps less awed by the charismatic authority of actors and directors than in the days when the text was regularly described as a “blueprint for performance.” That blueprint has produced so many different structures—many of them ramshackle or bizarre—that we are forced back upon Shakespeare’s text as the only authoritative test for interpretation. But of course Shakespeare was an actor writing for other actors, and the way a speech or scene or character can be played—whether upon the Elizabethan or the modern stage or in the theater of our imagination—is an integral dimension of the drama his words create.

The “new criticism” that now seems so old trained me in close reading, and I shall try to support even my largest generalizations with close attention to detail. The kind of analysis I aim at is thus both broad and sharp—“zooming in and out” my daughter Katy calls it. The new criticism also warned us not to equate the meaning of a literary work with its author’s intent, and I shall have relatively little to say about Shakespeare’s intentions (though sometimes that proves unavoidable). But Shakespeare’s plays abide our questions even if their dead author does not. Many—perhaps most—current interpreters of *Lear* are content, even gratified, when their queries elicit answers that are multiple, ambiguous, or sometimes directly contradictory. My students, I fear, often considered me dogmatic, and indeed I am opposed by temperament as well as conviction to this fashionable indeterminacy. I prefer to rely in the older way on evidence and argument and partial proof to reach conclusions that if not certain—and what is certain in this sublunary globe?—may yet be probable, persuasive, even perhaps compelling.

It is indeed my belief that the play itself can answer our questions—but only if we know which questions to ask and how to ask them. The method described in my first chapter is what I call “integrative analysis.” It comes out of my double experience as teacher and actor, for it combines theatrical and literary approaches—a deliberately wide range of these—in an attempt to examine the play in all its various dimensions. Such eclecticism is commonplace in the classroom, where it is practiced in unselfconscious innocence. It is comparatively rare—perhaps even taboo—in the more rigorous world of scholarly books and critical articles, which commonly adhere to a single analytic approach and address a single theme or problem. But I would argue that only through a purposeful combination and synthesis can we hope to discern the “thing itself,” the complex but unified imaginative creation that is Shakespeare’s play.

As I have already indicated, this book—however long it has taken in writing and rewriting—is the product of impulse, not of plan. What prompted me to write it was reading Ron Rosenbaum’s *Shakespeare Wars*, which a good friend gave me as a birthday present after I acted in the play. Rosenbaum’s statements quoted at the beginning of my first chapter came as a shock. They forced me to recognize that there are scholarly reasons for supposing that the Folio version of Lear’s final lines—those words that I had so long acted, taught, and loved—might actually be Shakespeare’s later revision of the original ending recorded in the Quarto. If that earlier version is not merely the intriguing textual curiosity I had always considered it, if instead it accurately represents Shakespeare’s first conception of how Lear dies, the difference to the meaning of the play is total. So I felt impelled to scrutinize, dispute, and if possible disprove the claims of other scholars for the Quarto ending. The need to support my argument led me to consider and include every type of evidence I could find. This wide-ranging but often detailed process of analysis ultimately led me to an understanding of Lear’s final lines—and hence of the play that leads so ineluctably to them—which was new to me, and may perhaps be of interest to others.

CHAPTER I

REDEEMING THE TEXT

Perhaps the most important, complex, and difficult problem in Shakespeare studies, declares Ron Rosenbaum in *The Shakespeare Wars*, is the question of Lear's last words. In the Folio, they are, "Do you see this? Look on her! Look, her lips! / Look there, look there!" Instead, the Quartos have only "O, o, o, o," followed by a line that the Folio assigns to Kent, "Break heart, I prithe break."² This discrepancy between F and Q vanishes in most modern editions of *King Lear*, which conflate both texts, routinely preferring F as the superior but drawing on Q for passages missing or clearly misrepresented in F. In the last thirty years, however, the problem of Lear's final lines has become more pressing—even, as Rosenbaum puts it, "scandalous."³ The older view that underlies and justifies a conflated text regarded F and Q as corrupted versions of a single Shakespearean original, the so-called "lost archetype." But beginning about 1980, a number of scholars have argued that Q, deriving from Shakespeare's draft or "foul papers," and F, probably deriving from a theatrical playbook, represent not only different stages in the compositional process but distinct plays.⁴ We have not one but two *King Lears*.

² Quotations are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, sometimes (as here) with altered punctuation. Quotations from the Folio and the Quarto—hereafter F and Q—are from Michael Warren's *Parallel King Lear* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) with page references and modern spelling and punctuation. For the Q and F versions of Lear's final lines, see this parallel text, pp. 146-7. A note on my title: I use "scene" in the usual sense for divisions of the action marked by clearing of the stage, but also for subdivisions of such scenes marked by a significant exit or entrance. This is, I believe, the classic French usage, and such 'groupings' (as we called them in graduate school) are often meaningful structural units in Shakespeare. The "last scene" of *Lear* thus begins with Lear's entrance bearing Cordelia.

³ *The Shakespeare Wars* (New York: Random House, 2006), p. 114.

⁴ It seems that F was printed from a fresh copy of the (edited) play book. But textual scholars will recognize how drastically I am simplifying issues that are

I shall call those who advance and defend this theory the “dualists.” Their thesis includes (appropriately) two somewhat contrasting premises. The first maintains that Q and F are distinct and independent entities, while the second posits their interconnection, claiming that F is Shakespeare’s revision of Q. While the fortunes of dualism have flowed and ebbed over the last thirty years, the controversy has remained almost entirely textual. There has been remarkably little discussion of how the two *Lears* differ in meaning. Interpretive analysis has largely been employed to support or oppose the textual theory. But it is the ultimate interpretive issue which I here wish to address, though much of my argument will necessarily be textual.

Lear’s dying words in Q and F give the play—or plays—two different endings. Though there are only four monosyllables in Q and fourteen simple words in F, Rosenbaum does not exaggerate their importance: the whole meaning of Shakespeare’s greatest play—or plays—turns on this tiny difference in wording. *Respice finem* is a literary as well as an ethical principle. The common but traditional definitions of comedy and tragedy focus on their happy or unhappy endings. And in Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy the unhappy ending is the death of the protagonist. This tragic event is “final” in the Aristotelian as well as the usual sense: it is the “end”—again in the Aristotelian sense—to which everything before it leads and points. “More are men’s ends mark’d than their lives before,” says Gaunt in *Richard II*. But the hero’s tragic end involves words as well as actions. “The tongues of dying men,” says Gaunt, “Enforce attention like deep harmony.” It is his own dying words that Gaunt means, but his words prepare us for the ending of the play. There Richard, as full of valor as of royal blood, dies fighting bravely against odds. Is this not symbolically the trial by combat which he himself interrupted earlier on? His last words are a rhyming couplet: “Mount, mount my soul. Thy seat is up on high, / whilst my gross flesh sinks downward, here to die.” Do not these final moments radically affect our judgment of this vain and worldly king?

Still, my claim that Lear’s few final lines give the whole tragedy its shape and meaning may seem both exaggerated and implausible. Let us glance at another example closer to *Lear* in date and genre than *Richard II*. The four great Shakespearean tragedies are remarkable both for how much they are alike and how much they differ. And few plays could contrast more sharply than *Othello* and *King Lear*: the romantic Mediterranean

complex, controversial, and highly technical. For a convenient summary, see R.A. Foakes in the third *Arden Lear* (Nelson: Walton-on-Thames, 1992), pp. 110-128, hereafter cited as Arden 3.

warmth of one seems poles away from the stark northern bleakness of the other. Yet *Othello* was the tragedy Shakespeare wrote just before *Lear*, and he deploys a strikingly similar dramatic strategy at the end of both. In *Othello* as in *Lear*, our judgment of the hero and our understanding of the play depend upon his final utterances. “Speak of me as I am,” says Othello—but that is not easy to do. In the lines that follow is Othello—in T.S. Eliot’s notably vulgar phrase—cheering himself up? Or do we hear again, though now with deeper harmony—what Wilson Knight calls the Othello music?

Our reading of the play, I repeat, is shaped by our reading of these lines. The overall dramatic pattern of *Othello* resembles a morality play as the “divine Desdemona” and the “demidevil” Iago contend for possession of Othello’s soul. The issues are ultimate: “...there be souls that must be sav’d,” mutters the drunken Cassio, “and there be souls must not be sav’d.” Plainly, Desdemona belongs to the first category and Iago to the second—but what of Othello himself? Up to this point the play dramatizes the typical morality paradigm of temptation and fall. But the fate of the morality protagonist may remain in doubt until his final moments. Indeed one morality—Nathaniel Woodes’ “Conflict of Conscience”—actually has two alternate endings: in one the protagonist is damned, while in the other he repents and is saved.⁵ Which parallels the ending of *Othello*? Is Shakespeare’s play a tragedy of damnation in which Othello’s last speeches express an unavailing remorse that leads him to self-slaughter? Or is it a tragedy in which Othello’s tears are indeed medicinal and his repentance turns self-murder into expiatory sacrifice? As in *Lear*, everything turns on a crux involving the play’s two competing texts, the second Quarto and the Folio. Is Othello Q’s “base Indian” who ignorantly threw away a pearl of great price? Or is he Judas, F’s “base Judean” who betrayed love with a kiss and after slew himself?

The alternate endings of *Lear* are just as diametrically opposed, and the contrast amounts to a difference in genre. Among the myriad types and forms of tragedy, two patterns which recur through different periods and cultures may fairly be considered generic archetypes. One kind of tragedy—and I use ‘kind’ in both the renaissance and the modern sense—is punitive while the other is redemptive. In one the protagonist’s suffering and death result from and often punish his crimes or errors. In the other,

⁵ I am drawing on the discussion of Woodes’ play in Bernard Spivak, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil* (New York: Columbia, 1958), pp. 258-9. As is shown by the example of the thief on the cross, repentance never comes too late, and it is this possibility that creates the drama of the final soliloquy in *Doctor Faustus*: “O, I’ll leap up to my God! Who pulls me down?”

the hero's suffering purges his fault and transforms his character, a redeeming process that makes his death as much consummation as destruction. Punitive tragedy often ends in *sparagmos*, the literal or figurative dismemberment of the protagonist. But redemptive tragedy often ends in epiphany, a revelation or vision that may include both the human and the divine. Examples of these contrasted types in Greek drama are *Agamemnon* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, in renaissance drama *Doctor Faustus* and *Samson Agonistes*, in modern European drama *Hedda Gabler* and *Saint Joan*, in contemporary American drama *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Angels in America*. And this is the difference between the two texts of *Lear*.

The ending of Q might well befit a drama of crime and punishment.⁶ We pity Lear, but the rack on which he has been stretched so long is an instrument of justice, not only of torture. His sufferings in the last scene are the consequences of his errors in the first: the kingdom he divided is now rent by civil dissension and foreign invasion; the loving daughter he willfully exiled is now lost to him forever. He dies in inarticulate despair. In contrast the ending of F befits a drama of transformation. Lear errs, but he is a man more sinned against than sinning and we forgive his faults as Cordelia does. His suffering does more than pay for them: it changes Lear himself. He dies in a moment of ecstatic happiness, a vision which even if it be delusion gives him joy, and which miraculously may be true.

Did Shakespeare give his play both these very different endings? Are both equally valid and authoritative? Is the second his rewriting of the first? Or is only one ending right? How we answer these questions will decide how we interpret the whole play. *Finis coronat opus*.

It might be more artistic to let my own answers emerge in the course of the discussion that follows. But it will make the argument easier to follow if I state my conclusions in advance. I believe, then, that F's ending is not only superior to Q's: it is the only right ending and—as I further believe—the only one Shakespeare ever wrote. But before trying to prove this, I want to take a backward glance at the textual controversy which led to such questions even being raised.

⁶ Other interpretations of Q are of course possible—for example a nihilistic or existential reading that would align *Lear* with modern plays like *Endgame*. The punitive reading seems more Elizabethan.

Two *Lears*

The idea of a double *Lear* still feels novel and controversial today, but in fact it is more than thirty years since Michael Warren advanced it in 1978.⁷ This revolutionary hypothesis took on substance and credibility with the publication in 1983 of *The Division of the Kingdoms*, a collection of essays that supported, applied, and extended it. The dual theory achieved something approaching canonical status when the Oxford *Complete Works* (1986) printed Q's *History of King Lear* and F's *Tragedy of King Lear* side by side. By 1997, the editor of the third Arden edition wrote that the revisionist view of Q and F as distinct versions—virtually amounting to different plays—had “tended to harden into a critical orthodoxy,” so that other editors followed one text or the other or presented both in parallel.

But a reaction had already set in. The binary hypothesis entails grave practical problems. In the sublunary world not inhabited by textual scholars and literary critics, most of us get to know Shakespeare in the classroom or the theater. But the consequences of the dual theory would be a pedagogic nightmare (how does a teacher assign two *King Lears*?) and a theatrical dilemma (has any professional company succeeded in staging Q as it stands?). On the one hand, the Royal Shakespeare Company, attempting to act the Folio version, was obliged by the protests of its Lear, John Wood, to reintroduce the mad trial in 3.6, although it is cut in F. On the other hand, a production at the University of Rochester which experimented with performing Q found the mad trial one of the play's outstanding scenes. But other passages in Q—even after “every effort short of perverse stubbornness” to make them work in rehearsal—proved unplayable or hopelessly inferior. One such passage, predictably, was Lear's last speech in Q, which seemed dismaying at first sight and “at best drab and at worse ridiculous when acted.” Sensibly, the Rochester company ended its performance of Q with F.⁸ Thus the dual hypothesis

⁷ “Quarto and Folio *King Lear* and the Interpretation of Albany and Edgar” in *Shakespeare, Pattern of Excelling Nature*, ed. David Bevington and Jay Halio (Newark, Delaware: 1978), pp. 95-107. The lecture on which this essay is based was apparently delivered two years earlier.

⁸ This is literally true since the play's final lines were assigned to Edgar as in F, not Albany as in Q. The director, David Richman, provides a consistently interesting and often illuminating report on the production in “The *King Lear* Quarto in Rehearsal and Performance,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 37 (1986), 374-82 (see pp. 375, 379 for my quotations).

seems to fail the practical test of performance: in staging *Lear*, some conflation of F and Q seems almost unavoidable.

Meanwhile on the scholarly and critical front, defenders of the binary *Lear* and the view of F as an authorial revision of Q have been subject to repeated assault—not a general onslaught on the scale of *The Division of the Kingdoms* but a running series of raids and counterattacks. Many of these objections and arguments—some of which are echoed in the following pages—seem cogent and persuasive. Gradually the tide of battle has turned, until in 2006, reviewing the second edition of the Oxford *Complete Works*, that formidable Shakespearean, Brian Vickers, could pronounce the theory of a double *Lear* “demolished.”⁹

Why then revisit it now? One reason is that Vickers’ decided and decisive judgment may be premature. After all, the year that he pronounced the question finally closed is the same year that Rosenbaum presented it as scandalously open. Rosenbaum is not a scholar of Vickers’ eminence, but his account reports interviews with most of the major figures in the controversy. It matters too that Vickers is writing a short review for the audience of the *Times Literary Supplement*, while Rosenbaum is writing a commercial book designed for a much wider readership. This imbalance typifies the way the controversy has developed. The case against a revised Folio and a binary *Lear*, compelling though it may be, has been argued by scholars addressing other scholars in brief, isolated articles that appear in learned journals. The double *Lear*, on the other hand, has been enshrined in the Oxford *Complete Plays* with its accompanying *Textual Companion*, and reflected in other editions, like the popular and widely used Norton. And the case for it has been elaborately argued in the essays collected as *The Division of the Kingdoms*. A later collection, *Lear from Study to Stage* (1997), might be seen as a retort, but its effect is diluted by the wider concerns indicated in its title and by its obvious effort to preserve an even balance.¹⁰

Writing in 1991, Grace Ioppolo could claim that the new revisionists had achieved a *coup d’état* that redefines the Shakespearean canon and the ways that scholars read, study, and teach it. Their arguments, she says, have “rebelliously overthrown” the textual and literary criticism of *Lear*, as well as all the other Shakespearean plays that exist in variant forms.¹¹ But this revolutionary ardor, this mood of triumphalism has faded in the

⁹ “By Other Hands,” *Times Literary Supplement*, August 22, 2006, p. 12.

¹⁰ Only four of the thirteen essays in *From Study to Stage* concern the two-text problem. Of these, one surveys the controversy, one opposes the binary theory and one supports it, while the fourth argues for a conflated text.

¹¹ *Revising Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 3.

decades since. Nowadays we no longer hear much about Q and F as separate and independent plays like *Lear* and *Leir*. Perhaps that drastic and dramatic claim can be set down to youthful hybris and scholarly hype. Nevertheless, many—perhaps most—editors and critics continue to view Q and F as distinct versions of *Lear*, and F as containing numerous revisions of Q. This happy consensus depends in part on the ambiguity of “versions,” a comprehensive and accommodating term that can refer to texts that show major and substantive changes, or only multiple minor variants which may not even be authorial.¹² But the view of F and Q as different “versions,” however that term may be understood, is reflected both in editing and in critical interpretation. The texts of Q and F are published separately, as in Jay Halio’s New Cambridge editions, or side by side as in Michael Warren’s *Parallel King Lear*. Critics likewise juxtapose the two versions for their interpretive purposes. David Scott Kastan, the general editor of the Arden Shakespeare, suggests that the ending of F with its false anagnorisis is “arguably darker” than the end of Q.¹³ Stephen Metcalf, whose reading of the last scene resembles my own, still regards F as a revision of Q, entailing a “radical change” in Lear’s despairing death.¹⁴ It would also entail a radical change in Shakespeare himself: to borrow Dowden’s metaphor, Q shows him in the depths, while in F he is on the heights.

Dowden’s antithetic phrases describe the movement from the great tragedies to the late romances. If with Gary Taylor we date the revision of F about 1610 at the same time as *Cymbeline*, then the change in

¹² F and Q are obviously versions in the second sense, and that is the way I use the term. I deny that they are versions in the first and stronger sense, but I take no position on the broader issues of Shakespearean revisions discussed by Ioppolo—indeed, I am not qualified to offer any opinion. To me, Ioppolo’s analysis of the Shakespearean canon and of contemporary dramatists seems often tendentious but also useful and provocative.

¹³ “‘A rarity most beloved:’ Shakespeare and the Idea of Tragedy” in *A Companion to Shakespeare’s Works, Volume I, The Tragedies*, ed., Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Blackwell, 2003; paperback 2006), p. 13. The “false anagnorisis” phrase is quoted from A.D. Nuttall, *Why Does Tragedy Give Pleasure?* (Oxford University Press, 1996). It is ironic that Kastan’s citations support a view of the play’s ending that Nuttall himself later renounced (see *Thinking with Shakespeare* in the next note).

¹⁴ “Dreaming, Looking, and Seeing: Shakespeare and the Myth of Resurrection,” in *Thinking with Shakespeare: Comparative and Interdisciplinary Essays for A.D. Nuttall*, ed. William Poole and Richard Scholar (Modern Humanities Research and Meney Publishing, 2007), pp. 109-110. I came upon Metcalf’s essay only while revising this book.

the ending of *Lear* fits the ongoing evolution in Shakespeare's imagination and his plays. But if, as René Weiss contends, nothing in *Lear* points to a date later than 1606, then this transforming change occurs about the time that Shakespeare is writing *Macbeth*, the darkest of the tragedies. Is this plausible—or even possible?

Conflation and Compromise

What results when we attempt to combine Q and F? The most recent Arden edition may serve as an example. Its editor, R. A. Foakes—himself a contributor to *The Division of the Kingdoms*—modifies the view of Q and F as distinct plays there propounded by Michael Howard, Gary Taylor, and Stanley Wells. Instead he adopts the now conventional view of the two texts as differing versions of the same play. But none of the differences between them, he contends, radically affect the play's plot or general structure.¹⁵ So he offers a conflated text rather in the traditional style but carefully marking the passages peculiar to either version. The Introduction takes a middle ground, though it explores at perhaps too great length the signs of Shakespearean revision in F. The result of this attempt to have it both ways is a loose and bland indeterminacy. According to Foakes, it remains up to readers and directors to make up their own minds “whether to prefer Q to F, F to Q, or to take readings from both.”¹⁶

Thus in discussing Lear's final speech, Foakes summarizes and quotes both Q and F without deciding between them, or indeed between the various interpretations of F's “added lines.” He concludes that the uncertainty of the play's ending, with its opposed possibilities of meaning, “confound any attempt to show the Quarto or Folio as validating a fixed interpretation” (pp. 75, 79). True to this determined indeterminacy, Lear's last lines include the “O, o, o, o” from Q and “Look there!” from F. Even visually the result is very strange:

[Q] O [Q] thou'lt come no more,
 Never, never, never, [F] never, never [F].
 [To Edgar?] Pray you undo this button. Thank you, sir.
 [Q] O, o, o, o.[Q]
 [F] Do you see this? Look on her: look, her lips,
 Look there, look there! *He dies.* [F]

¹⁵ In *King Lear: New Critical Essays* (2008), Foakes reverts to the view of F as a significant revision of Q.

¹⁶ Arden 3, pp. 118-9.

This eclectic repackaging offers us two deaths for the price of one. But the resulting combination cannot, I think, be acted. Its internal logic is not clear: why should loosening Lear's button produce his dying moans, and how do they lead to what seems a moment of epiphany? How can the actor speak those repeated O's without repeating—and diminishing—the effect of those repeated nevers? The actor (and reader) will indeed have to make up their own minds because the editor declines to do so.¹⁷

This refusal of closure, the insistence on balancing opposed or even contradictory views, is common in current interpretations of *Lear*, and especially of its ending. Indeed, if my limited reading is representative, it seems at present the dominant critical mode in such discussions. It may be seen as sophisticated and open-minded or weak and evasive. The reasons for this fetishization of the indeterminate are not hard to discern: they would include the sheer multiplication of alternate interpretations on stage and page, the effects of post-structural and deconstructive theory, and the prestige of science in certain of its aspects, as witnessed by recurring, even ritual obeisance to the Heisenberg principle and wave/particle theory in quantum mechanics. It now seems possible to have the truth both ways at once. Coming from a very different and much older intellectual position, I find myself irresistibly reminded of the harsh message to the Laodiceans in Revelation 3.6: "Because thou art neither cold nor hot, I shall spew thee out of my mouth." Surely we can do better than this lukewarm balancing of alternatives.¹⁸

Present Tense: Three Perspectives

What is the present state of the textual controversy? I have spoken of "consensus", but perhaps "confusion" would be more accurate. Three essays in Jeffrey Kahan's 2008 anthology of recent *Lear* criticism show the range of recent views. They articulate three quite different positions, all of which I would question or oppose.

Tom Clayton, "one of the chief architects of the Quarto/Folio revisionist school," claims that with the general acceptance that F

¹⁷ If we are inclined to dismiss *Arden 3*'s version of Lear's dying speech as the aberration of an older edition and a particular editor, it is sobering to find a verbally identical version in Grace Ioppolito's Norton Critical Edition of *Lear*, published as recently as 2008.

¹⁸ My dismissal of *Arden 3* and its editor is, I think, too severe. Like many others, I grew up—or in my case, grew old—using Kenneth Muir's splendid *Arden 2*. But when I have had occasion to consult *Arden 3*, I have found it a mine of useful information and sometimes of acute observations.

represents Shakespeare's own revisions, "there are now two versions of Lear." But in discussing his chosen theme of justice, he draws on both texts and compares them very even-handedly. He even decides that Albany, who speaks the play's last lines in Q, has a stronger claim than Edgar, who speaks them in the revised F. And he concludes—surprisingly, paradoxically, but with touching candor—"there is one and only one *King Lear*."

In "The Reshaping of *King Lear*," R.A. Foakes seeks to show a consistent pattern of revision that he failed to discern ten years earlier when he edited *Arden 3*. He takes issue with Richard Knowles, who pointed out that in F

No speech of any length is rewritten to make it substantially different in content or style, no new scenes or episodes are added, no changes are made in the order of existing scenes or episodes, no new characters are added, no named characters are omitted (or renamed), no new speeches are made to elaborate upon themes or to provide new and different motives.... If F *Lear* represents a new "concept" of the play, it is remarkably limited in its means of expression (p. 109).

Foakes has no difficulty in showing that lines added in the first scene do in fact elaborate on themes and provide further motives for Lear. And he goes on to detect alterations in other characters besides the King—the Fool, Kent, Edgar, and Albany. Most of this material was noted in *Arden 3*: there it did not constitute revision; here it does. It "subtly changes the dramatic shaping of the play" (p. 105). Unfortunately, Foakes' argument for revision forces him to accept and defend the omission of the mad trial in 3.6: it is "a fine piece of theater, but arguably superfluous in the flow of the action" (p. 113). An important element in this revisionist argument is a theory already advanced in *Arden 3*. The fact that allusions to the King of France and his invasion in Q are systematically cut after the third act in F suggests that, as originally conceived, *Lear* like *Leir* was to end with France and Cordelia returning to restore the old King to his throne. This, I believe, is fantasy, but if true, it would have the unhappy effect of adding yet another hypothetical version of the play: instead of two *Lears*, we have three!¹⁹

¹⁹ Another unhappy result: the change of Cordelia from "the weeping embodiment of compassion" in Q to the "fighting Queen" at the head of an army in F indicates to Foakes that "Cordelia is heading an invasion as if she were an enemy of her native country" (p. 120). Surely she is an enemy only of Regan, Goneril, and their accomplices?

Richard Knowles' magisterial essay "The Evolution of the Texts of *Lear*" is of a different caliber than the other two, and I cannot do justice to its detailed argument here. But as his title indicates, Knowles is concerned not with the "reshaping" of *Lear* but its "evolution," the constant, ongoing process of change between Q and F. He accepts the evidence advanced by Alfred Hart almost a century earlier that several of Shakespeare's histories and tragedies, including *Lear*, exceed the length normal in plays of their time and—more significantly—the length of any possible performance in the Elizabethan or Jacobean theater. Knowles thus deftly disarms the objection that a conflated modern text is an editorial invention that does not correspond to what Shakespeare's company performed and his audience witnessed. For the same is true of Q and F, neither of which is short enough to form the two hours' traffic of the Elizabethan stage. Even if Q represents the draft or "foul papers" that Shakespeare delivered to his company, it would need to be radically cut—and possibly revised in the process—before it could be performed at the Globe or Blackfriars or Whitehall. Thus, despite the claims of its subtitle, the version of *Lear* published in 1608 was already theatrically obsolete.

Knowles' account of F is even more destabilizing. He emphasizes the number of intermediaries between Shakespeare's original draft and the text that appears in the Folio. According to Knowles, these probably included two scribes, five compositors, the bookkeeper, a number of editors—possibly including Shakespeare—who cut many lines, added a few speeches, inserted act and scene divisions, regularized speech prefixes and provided stage directions, smoothed the meter and modernized the language. Besides these textual adjustments there must have been the unrecorded alterations made by the company "from one revival or even one work to the next" (p. 137). The "evolution" in Knowles' title implies not teleological development but "simple mutability" (p. 125).

What becomes in these essays of *Lear*'s dying words, the subject of the present study? None of the authors appears to recognize their importance to the larger meaning of the play. Knowles mentions them almost parenthetically in his statistical survey of how little F changes Q. Among the brief additions to *Lear*'s part, these two lines are "the most significant to critics" (p. 139). Only, one wonders, to them? Clayton acknowledges that despite their brevity, they "drastically alter" *Lear*'s last speech, but he does not explain this "profound substantive change" (p. 202). Instead, the page he devotes to this passage is wholly concerned with the exact placement of the stage direction, *Lear dies*. Foakes, to his credit, pays more attention to the dying words that "notably enrich *Lear*'s final moments." They evoke significant questions:

Does [Lear] imagine that the daughter who refused to say anything in the opening scene now speaks? Does he die... even as he thinks she may be alive, or is it merely a delusion? Is death a welcome release or a painful reminder of the death and destruction Lear has brought about?

Characteristically, Foakes risks no answers to his own questions: he is content to note that “the rich play of ambiguities” is “intensely moving” (p. 114). Nothing suggests that answering such questions might make a difference to the tragedy as a whole.

Knowles’ essay is at once the most convincing and the most disquieting of these three. Given the long, uncertain evolution that produced F, he writes, an editor may be driven back to Q. “Formerly it was classed among the ‘bad quartos’; now, because of its closeness to Shakespeare’s original manuscript, it has undergone a remarkable rehabilitation and may in time (as I expect it will) replace F as the preferred basis for modern editions” (pp. 148-9). In such an edition Lear’s “Look there” will presumably be reduced to a footnote or consigned to an appendix. That will be a dark day.

One King Lear

There is, however, a still darker alternative. All the “bickering and squabbling over whether Shakespeare revised *King Lear*,” writes H. R. Woudhuysen, “has led to a too rarely articulated sense that *Lear* as a work can never be recovered.”²⁰ What remains in Q and F is not two differing but authoritative versions of the play but an early draft already superseded in performance and a later text badly mangled by cutting. Both are too long to be acted, so that any attempt to recover *Lear* as it was performed by Shakespeare’s company is to pursue a will-o’-the-wisp that can only lead us into swamps of theatrical speculation and quagmires of textual controversy.²¹ We are thus left not with the revisionists’ two *King*

²⁰ “Editors and Texts, authorities and originals,” in *Textual Performances: The Modern Reproduction of Shakespeare’s Drama*, ed. Lukas Erne and Margaret Kidnic (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 43.

²¹ Performance theorists who insist that a play is only realized when it is performed have to decide which performance realizes the play. If tape recorders and video cameras miraculously enabled us to see and hear what actually happened on the stages of the Globe or the Blackfriars, the record would be invaluable for scholarly purposes. But given Elizabethan rehearsal, production, and acting styles, I think the performance itself would come as a shocking and salutary disillusionment. It is possible, of course, to argue that any performance, then or now, is a “realization”

Lears or *Ernes*' multiple *King Lears* but no *King Lear* at all—no authorial manuscript, no reliable printed text, no account of actual performance—unless we can recreate *King Lear* as Shakespeare conceived it.

This is what Anthony Dawson calls the “imagined” or “imaginary text.”²² That may sound like a yet more elusive will-o’-the-wisp, but “imaginary” here does not mean “fictive as opposed to real,” but “real because imagined.” To us, living in a materialist and scientific culture, the real *King Lear* can only mean what scholars call the “lost archetype” or the “ideal text.” Despite the overtones of “archetype” and “ideal,” these are physical objects—the author’s final manuscript or a playbook that could be “lost” like the playbook of *A Winter’s Tale*. The imagined text on the other hand is not a thing but a concept, and in this it seems closer to Renaissance ways of thinking. According to Sidney in the *Defence of Poesy*, “. . . every understanding knoweth the skill of each artificer standeth in that Idea or foreconceit of the work, and not in the work itself.” That “the poet hath that Idea is manifest,” Sidney goes on, “by delivering them forth in such excellency as he has imagined them.”²³

of the play, but that way chaos lies. So too the insistence of many formidable scholars that *Lear* was changed constantly for particular occasions, locales, revivals, or subsequent performances is a very academic attempt at theatrical realism. Of course the players had to make changes in staging if they moved from a London theater to the hall of a great house. But anyone experienced in actual Shakespearean productions will recognize the idea of ongoing textual tinkering as precisely untheatrical. True, actors rehearsing a modern play in London or New York must accommodate frequent and sometimes drastic authorial revisions, a process that may last up to or beyond opening night. But the production methods of Shakespeare’s company were very different. They had scant time for group rehearsal of the play as a whole, and still less, one would suppose, to accommodate minor textual changes and adjustments. If Burbage and Armin, after memorizing their long and exacting individual parts, were told by Shakespeare that “today we are omitting three lines in your first speech,” or “we need to change five words in the last scene,” they would probably have strangled him. I do not see how Shakespeare could have refrained from correcting words or lines when he felt they needed improvement, but the conception of a performance script in constant flux is a deconstructive fantasy.

²² “The Imaginary Text, or the Curse of the Folio” in *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance*, ed. Barbara Hodgdon and W. B. Worthen (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

²³ *The Defence of Poesy in Sir Philip Sidney: Selected Prose and Poetry*, ed. Robert Kimbrough (New York: Holt Rinehard paperback, 1969), pp. 108-9. The first syllable of “foreconceit” is misleading. Sidney’s analogy between the human poet and that greater Maker whose poem is the world may be responsible: God in the seven days of creation is working out a conception—a *logos*—preexisting in

Shakespeare's account in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is less Platonic and more playful. According to Theseus the lunatic, the lover and the poet are "of imagination all compact." The poet's eye glances from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,

And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to aery nothing
A local habitation and a name.

A "local habitation" like the wood outside Athens, let us say, and a "name" like Oberon—or Theseus. For Theseus, the skeptic who "never may believe / These antique fables, nor these fairy toys" is himself an antique fable.²⁴ Shakespeare is winking at his audience, and his equation of poets and madmen is part of the joke. But I seize on such terms as "forms" and "shapes," for "form" has Platonic overtones: it is the idea that imagination bodies forth in the "shape" of a play.

Heminge and Condell, Shakespeare's fellow actors, promise that the First Folio gives the reader Shakespeare's plays "as he conceived them." But if the true and real *King Lear* is a concept rather than a thing, the play that Shakespeare created in his imagination, how can this be embodied in performance or given the local habitation of a text? It is indeed an archetype, of which F and Q are only versions, but how do we get from these partial resemblances, these versions, to the "thing itself"? How do we recover, reconstitute, or redeem the one *King Lear*?

There are means, as Cordelia's doctor tells her so reassuringly. Textual scholarship has done its best—or worst—and the results are inconclusive: we are left divided between Q, which claims to be closer to Shakespeare's original manuscript, and F, which claims to represent a subsequent revision. It is time to invoke a different method, what I describe in my Introduction as "integrative analysis." After these flights to a Platonic heaven of ideas, the reader may welcome a return to earth and the solid ground provided by statistics. Knowles estimates that 90 percent

the divine mind. But Sidney's own experience in writing an extended fiction like the *Arcadia* must have shown him that the author's preconception develops through and in the course of his creation. And that may be true of the greater Creation too: are not the first chapters of Genesis a paradigm for creation that continues through history?

²⁴ Shakespeare may have regarded Theseus as at least quasi-historical: he appears in Plutarch, paired with Romulus, whose historical status seems equally dubious. Reality in MND hovers between antique fable and fairy toys, but the fairies have the last word: it is Puck, not Theseus, who addresses the audience at the end.