In April 1817 John Keats, aged twenty-one-and-a-half years, sailed to the Isle of Wight to overwhelm himself in poesy — his goal announced the previous year in "Sleep and Poetry" — to become a Poet by writing the big poem, Endymion: A Poetic Romance. Among his self-conscious baggage he carried his seven-volume, pocket-sized Shakespeare, newly acquired for the purpose. Just published by Whittingham, this Johnson-Steevens edition (but without their textual notes) was the latest in Shakespeare. Unable to wait til departure for the Isle of Poetry, and feeling lonely, though in high spirits, he "unbox'd a Shakespeare" for breakfast, as he wrote his brothers, and imbibed it with Trinculo's salutation from The Tempest, "There's my Comfort."2

Though it was heavy for such a light traveler, Keats may also have taken Comfort in his 1804 facsimile of Shakespeare's Folio of 1623 — the "oldest" in Shakespeare — which he may also have recently acquired. Of all the plays it was King Lear his mind was swimming with. Its evocation of the sea and cliff at Dover in Act 4 Scene 6 echoes in his sonnet "On the Sea," his first overwhelming of the voyage; he wrote it out for Reynolds in the first letter from the Isle, and confessed, "I have been rather narvus — and the passage in Lear — "Do you not hear the Sea? — has haunted me intensely."3 As Middleton Murry concluded, Keats had made an irrational identification of Lear with the sea.4 This may explain his imagery, when he wrote, "That which is creative must create itself — In Endymion, I leaped headlong into the Sea."5 

Whichever edition of Shakespeare he was now reading and misquoting in his letters, Keats' underlinings and
marginalia for King Lear curiously are found only in the facsimile, of which volume we shall see more in a moment.

Settling into his quarters in Carisbrooke required a ritual act: Keats constructed something of a shrine by arranging his treasured books symbolically with pictures by his friend, Haydon. There was the picture of Milton's daughters, to whom, tradition says, the father dictated the great visions. More auspicious was the preeminent status for the head of Shakespeare, whom Keats hesitatingly dared to fancy his “Presidor,” a portrait thrust into this hands by Fate and Mrs. Cook, his landlady, soon after his arrival.

Carisbrooke April 17th

My dear Reynolds,

Ever since I wrote to my Brothers from Southampton I have been in a taking, and at this moment I am about to become settled. For I have unpacked my books, put them into a snug corner — pinned up Haydon — Mary Queen of Scotts, and Milton with his daughters in a row. In the passage I found a head of Shakespeare which I had not before seen — It is most likely the same that George spoke so well of; for I like it extremely — Well — this head I have hung over my books, just above the three in a row, having first discarded a french Ambassador — Now this alone is a good morning's work — . . .

Back on the mainland three weeks later, Keats wrote with Lear still haunting him.

Margate Saturday Eve

My dear Haydon,

. . . — I suppose by your telling me not to give way to forebodings George has mentioned to you what I have lately said in my Letters to him — truth is I have been in such a state of Mind as to read over my Lines and hate them. I am “one that gathers Samphire dreadful trade” the Cliff of Poesy Towers above me — yet when, Tom who meets with some of Pope's Homer in Plutarch's Lives reads some of those to me they seem like Mice to mine. I read and write about eight hours a day. There is an old saying well begun is half done” — 't is a bad one. I would use instead — “Not begun at at 'till half done” so according to that I have not begun my Poem and consequently (a priori) can say nothing about it.

Keats as Samphire gatherer locates himself in a Shakespearean fiction, from Lear 4.6 again, significantly one of father atonement and of trick perspectives. Edgar, disguised as Mad Tom, has led his blinded, estranged father up the imaginary cliff at Dover, whence he conjures up a dizzy view of the sea below, and the old man leaps to his death — and to his senses. Edgar's non-existent Samphire gatherer is half-way up an imaginary cliff; in the poet's letter he is Keats himself, at the crucial beginning, half-way up the imaginative Cliff of Poesy, his existence as a poet in doubt. The mice in Shakespeare are the imagined diminutive
fishermen on the beach below, but the letter transforms them into real, mousy lines from Pope’s Homer read — not by Mad Tom but — by Brother Tom (whom we will see again in this role); and now Keats seems himself to have taken the place of the father on the dizzy height. Paradoxically Keats’ identity has shifted to that of the secure master whose predecessors are seen less as fathers than as dwarfs from Keats’ own poetic eminence. In the last twist it becomes now a “little eminence,” for which the poet, climbing again, needs high support. A typically witty and ironic description of Keats’ calling, its paradox is informed directly by the dramatic irony of the tragedy, and echoes its terrifying and never-ending problem of distance between son and father. As the letter continues, a new father swims into focus.

Thank God! I do begin arduously where I leave off, notwithstanding occasional depressions: and I hope for the support of a High Power while I clime this little eminence and especially in my Years of more momentous Labor. I remember your saying that you had notions of a good Genius presiding over you — I have of late had the same thought, for things which do half at Random are afterwards confirmed by my judgment in a dozen features of Propriety — Is it too daring to Fancy Shakspeare this Presider? When in the Isle of Wight I met with a Shakspeare in the Passage of the House at which I lodged — it comes nearer to my idea of him than any I have seen — I was but there a Week yet the old Woman made me take it with me though I went off in a hurry — Do you not think this is ominous of good? I am glad you say every Man of great Views is at times tormented as I am — . . .

That the auspicious rearrangements of Mrs. Cook’s portraits by her short-term tenant, and his displacement of the French ambassador by the English poet to preside at the head of his library of Comforts in a snug corner should have allowed him to settle at last, and should alone have been a good morning’s work, testifies to a dual status of the Book for the uneasy but self-satirizing and hopeful poet: Keats valued the Book not only for its content but also as an icon.

A half year later Keats was sounding deeper in Shakespeare:

*Friday Jan 23rd*

*My dear Bailey,*

. . . My brother Tom is getting stronger but his Spitting of blood continues — I sat down to read King Lear yesterday, and felt the greatness of the thing up to the writing of a Sonnet preparatory thereto — in my next you shall have it . . .

Keats had already finished copying out the first of the four books of the *Poetic Romance* for his publisher; his new interest in Lear marks not only a turn from “the stretched metre” of romance, to quote the Shakespearean epigraph to *Endymion*, but also a new penetration into Shakespeare and an ambition to write drama, which were the great gains of the
mixed achievement of *Endymion*. In a letter to his brothers George and Tom the same day, we hear again of the head of a poet and we see the promised sonnet. (The letter exists only in a transcription by the inexact copyist, John Jeffrey.)

*Friday 23rd January 1818*

My dear Brothers.

. . . Well! I have given the 1st book to Taylor; he seemed more than satisfied with it, & to my surprise proposed publishing it in Quarto if Haydon would make a drawing of some event therein, for a Frontispeice. . . . I left Haydon & the next day received a letter from him, proposing to make, as he says, with all his might, a finished chalk sketch of my head, to be engraved in the first style & put at the head of my Poem, saying at the same time he had never done the thing for any human being, & that it must have considerable effect as he will put the name to it — I begin to day to copy my 2nd Book “thus far into the bowels of the Land” — You shall hear whether it will be Quarto or non Quarto, picture or non Picture.

. . . I think a little change has taken place in my intellect lately — I cannot bear to be uninterested or unemployed, I, who for so long a time, have been addicted to passiveness — Nothing is finer for the purposes of great productions, than a very gradual ripening of the intellectual powers — As an instance of this — observe — I sat down yesterday to read *King Lear* once again the thing appeared to demand the prologue of a Sonnet, I wrote it & began to read — (I know you would like to see it)

“On sitting down to *King Lear* once Again”
O golden tongued Romance with serene Lute!
Fair plumed syren! Queen! if far away!
Leave melodizing on this wintry day,
Shut up thine olden volume & be mute.
Adieu! for once again the fierce dispute,
Betwixt Hell torment & impassioned Clay
Must I burn through; once more assay
The bitter sweet of this Shakespearean fruit
Chief Poet! & ye clouds of Albion.
Begettors of our deep eternal theme,
When I am through the old oak forest gone
Let me not wander in a barren dream
But when I am consumed with the Fire
Give me new Pheonix-wings to fly at my desire

So you see I am getting at it, with a sort of determination & strength, though verily I do not feel it at this moment — this is my fourth letter this morning & I feel rather tired & my head rather swimming — so I will leave it open till tomorrow’s post. — . . .

That he was “getting at it” is strikingly attested by Keats’ inscribing the
That 

Reynovce and Gildergierne are dead:

Where should we have our thankes?

Hor. Not from his mouth,

Had it the ability of life to thank you:

He never gave commandement for their death.

But since fo iumpe upon this bloody question,

You from the Polake warres, and you from England

Are here arrived. Give order that the bodies

High on a stage be placed to the view,

And let me speake to th'yet unknowing world,

How these things came about. So shall you heare

Of carnall, bloudie, and vnnaturall acts,

Of accidentall judgement, causall slaughters

Of death's put on by cunning, and for'd cause,

And in this vphpot, purposer mistooke,

False on the Inventors heads. All this can I

Truly deliver.

For. Let vs haue it hearde.

For me, with sorrow, I embrace my Fortune,

I haue some Rites of memory in this Kingdome,

Which are ro claine, my vantage doth

Invite me,

Hor. Of that I shall have alwayes cause to speake,

And from his mouth

Whole voice will draw on more:

But let this fame be prefently perform'd,

Even whiles mens minde are wilde,

Left more mischance

On plots, and errors happen.

For. Let foure Captaines

Bear Hamlet like a Soldier to the Stage,

For he was like, had he beene put on

To have prou'd most royally:

And for his paffige,

The Souldiers Mufike, and the rites of Warre

Speake lowdly for him.

Take vp the body; Such a sight as this

Becomes the Field, but here thews much amis.

Go, bid the Souldiers floote.

Exit Marching: after the which, a Peale of

Ordinance are shut off.

FINIS.

On setting downe to read King Lear once again.

O Golden tongued Paisance, with seven Smites!
    Faire famed loving, Dreame of far away!
Loose me, deparing on this witty day.

Shut up those slaine Pages and be mute,

A drene! for once again, the feares dispute
Believe Damnation and unsquality

Must I burn through; once more humbly ofrey

The bitter sweet of this Shaksperean fruit.

Chief Poet! art ye Clouds of Albion,

O fitter of this deep eternal frame,

Where through the old wide forest I am gone,

Let me but wander in a barriers dream:

But when I am consumed in the fire

Give me even Paisance wings to flyth my desire.

Jan. 22. 181.
THE TRAGÉDIE OF
KING LEAR.

Actus Primus. Scena Prima.

Enter Kent, Gloucester, and Edmund. Kent. Thought the King had more affected the Duke of Albany, then Cornwall. Gloucester. It did alwaies seeme so to vs: But now in the division of the Kingdome, it appeares not which of the Dukes bee valed for, for qualities are so weight'd, that curiosity in neither, can make choice of either sides moity. Kent. Is not this your Son, my Lord? Gloucester. His breeding Sir, hath bin at my charge. I have so often blu'd to acknowledge him, that now I know't not. Kent. I cannot conceive you. Gloucester. Sir, this yong Fellowes mother could; whereas upon the grow round worn'd, and had indee'd (Sir) a Sonne for her Cradle, ere the had a husband for her bed. Do you smell a fault? Kent. I cannot with the fault vndone, the issue of it, being so proper. Gloucester. But I have a Sonne, Sir, by order of Law, some yeere elder then this; who, yet is no deere in my account, though this Knew came somthing fawcily to the world before he was sent for: yet was his Mother fayre, there was good sport at his making, and the horfon must be acknowledged. Doe you know this Noble Gentleman, Edmund? Edmund. No, my Lord. Gloucester. My Lord of Kent: Remember him hereafter, as my Honourable Friend. Edmund. My Seruices to your Lordship. Kent. I must love you, and sue to know you better. Edmund. Sir, I shall study deferring. Gloucester. He hath bin out nine yeares, and away he shall againe. The King is coming. Sonnet. Enter King Lear, Cornwall, Albany, Gonerill, Regan, Cordelia, and attendants. Lear. Attend the Lords of France & Burgundy, Gloucester. Gloucester. I shall, my Lord. Exit. Lear. Meanes time we shall express our darker purpose. Give me the Map there. Know, that we have divid'd the three our Kingdome: and 'tis our fallintent, To make all Cours and Bawmefle from our Age, Confederring them on yonger strength, while we Vaharben'd crawl toward death. Our son of Cornwall, And you our no leffe loving Sonne of Albany, We have this houre a confant will to publishe Our daughters foursell Dowers, that future strive May be presented now. The Princes, France & Burgundy, Great Russals in our yodgett daughters lose, Long in our Court, have made their amorous fatigue, And here are to be seene. Tell me my daughters (Since now we will disfu'd vs both of Rule, Interest of Territory, Cares of State) Which of you shall we pay doth lose vs moiff, That we, our largest bounty may extend Where Nature doth with merit challenge. General, Our eldest borne, speake first. Gloucester. Sir, I loue you more then word can weild; matter, Deere then eye-fight, space, and libertie, Beyond what can be valed, rich or rare, No leffe then life, with grace, health, beauty, honor: As much as Childe ere born'd, or Father found. A loue that makes breath poore, and speech vnable, Beyond all manner of fo much I loue you. Gloucester. What shall Cordelia speake? Loue, and be silent. Lear. Of all these bounds even from this Line, to this, With shadowie Forrestes, and with Champains rich'd With plenteous Rivers, and wide-skirted Meades We make this Lady. To thine and Albany isles Be this perpetually. What fayes our second Daughter? Our deereft Regan, wife of Cornwall? Regan. I am made of that fellee-mettle as my Sister, And prize me at her worth. In my true heart, I finde the names my very deede of loue: Onely she comes too short, that I professe Me ife an enemy to all other issues, Which the moft precious guage of fello professe, And finde I am alone felicitate In your deere Highneffe lose. Gloucester. Then poore Cordelia, And yet not to, since I am sure my loue's More ponderous then my tongue. Lear. To thee, and thine hereditarie ear, Remaine this ample third of our faire Kingdome, No leffe in space, validitie, and pleasure Then that confer'd on General. Now our loy, Although our left and left; to whole yong loue, The Vines of France, and Milke of Burgundy, Strive to be interell. What can you say, to draw A third, more opilent then your Sisters? speake. Gloucester. Nothing my Lord. Lear. Nothing?
poem in the blank space in his facsimile below the “FINIS” of *The Tragedie of Hamlet* and facing the title-page of *The Tragedie of King Lear*. It would be difficult to imagine a more charged emptiness in English literature than here between these monuments. We already know something of what *Lear* meant to Keats; Hamlet he regarded as the hero of Shakespeare’s clouded-over middle age, and thought him more like Shakespeare than any of his other characters. At the end of “Sleep and Poetry” Keats had identified himself, the poet, as the father, his verse as the son; before Shakespeare it was, of course, he who must be the son, a son prepared, perhaps by his headlong leap into the Sea, to break the father’s silence here of all places, ready to “burn through” and “humbly [to] assay” the bitter and the sweet.

His movement towards and away from Shakespeare is choreographed in the structure of the sonnet. Its opening is romantic in topic and Italianate in structure, with repeated rhymes (abba) in an octave. This comes to an end with mention of “Shakespearean fruit.” The structure transforms from the predicted sestet into a Shakespearean quatrains and couplet, typically with new rhymes; it begins with a continuing reference to Shakespeare — but now as the Presidor, the “Chief Poet” himself, who is one of the begetters of “this” — and Keats thinks again, and draws closer — of “our eternal theme.” With this revision of diction the problem of atonement leaps off the page.

The sudden transformation from Italian to Shakespearean form is moderated somewhat by echoes in both halves of the poem of the Spenserian sonnet with its repeated rhymes and Italianate octave, and of like features of the stanza from *The Faerie Queene*, but especially of its final hexameter. As these echoes thus recall the Golden-tongued Romance bid to be mute in the octave (although the reference there seems more immediately to the *Poetic Romance, Endymion*, from which Keats had now emerged), we may observe that the sonnet’s structure is at the same time a dance towards Shakespeare and away. The end of the poem, however, may seem to tip the scales away from balance and reconciliation of its various strands, and to liberate the poet, self-immolated in the fire of the father, to his extra-vagant goal: flight outward “to” his desire — or less apocalyptically in the revision, flight “at” his desire. But the poet’s entreaty for deliverance and his demand for wings receive no answer here. All we see is the clarity with which Keats frames and refines his supplication.

The ever-problematic distance from the Presidor may be further elaborated, however, at some remove from the sonnet — in the contradictory descriptions of it in his letter to Bailey not only as “preparatory” (preparatory, I suppose, to Keats’ reading of the play); but also, curiously, as “prologue,” in the letter to his brothers. If Keats were not such a master of nuance, the latter word might read like a slip of the tongue: for its literal implication is that the sonnet has added to the play. By virtue of responding to its “demand” and offering *Lear* the sonnet as “prologue,”
Keats had entered into collaboration with Shakespeare. And if the son had so helped the father, were the new Phoenix Wings not already given even before they were entreated? This astonishing attitude toward his poem and its solicitation can now, in fact, be relocated in one of these two states of the sonnet. The title in the Folio is “On sitting down to read King Lear once again.” But the title of the letter in which Keats calls it the “prologue” reads, “‘On sitting down to King Lear once Again’.” Although the latter version descends to us only through Jeffrey’s transcription, we now have no reason to doubt the accuracy of its title. The easier scansion of this title line also suggests that a legitimate Keatspearian variant is involved, and that Keats was not sitting down to read Shakespeare’s King Lear, but to write it.¹²

It is thus literally and literarily inappropriate both to Keats’ physical and psychic inspiration and to all the internal, referential and contextual meanings of the sonnet to abstract it from its exact physical situation in the opening of the Folio icon; for even for Keats to open to Lear in January 1818 was in effect to bid Romance shut up her olden pages. Nor, as I shall argue presently, ought the poem to be severed from the whole Folio Lear. This treasured volume, now extended by Keats’ inscription, is an evolution of the apprentice shrine in the snug corner at Carisbrooke. That one was dominated by Shakespeare the Presidor; this new penetration into the head of poetry and into his book suggests Keats the Insider. Not, of course, that the problem of the young poet’s distance from the Chief of English poetry could ever be resolved; rather that the dawn of his new understandings of poetry would be figured in “new reenactments” of the drama of father and son.

Several months before he inscribed the Lear sonnet, Keats visited another Shakespeare shrine in which he made his mark. Of their October pilgrimage Bailey writes:

> Once we took a longer excursion of a day or two, to Stratford upon Avon, to visit the birthplace of Shakespeare. We . . . inscribed our names in addition to the ‘numbers numberless’ of those which literally blackened the walls: and if those walls have not been washed, or our names wiped out to find place for some others, they will still remain together upon that truly honored wall.¹³

And when he was, as Matthew Arnold affirmed, when we was with Shakespeare, the making of shrines by his admirers and family did not cease. To their sister, Keats’ brother George wrote:

> Louisville, Feb'y 1825

> My dear Fanny

> . . .—M”K has been confined with her fourth Girl, we hoped for a Boy to name him after poor John, who altho’ so long gone from us is constantly in our minds; his miniature over our mantel piece is partly hidden by a hyacynth in bloom; Shakespeare is next above him, Tom at the top, Beaumont and Fletcher on either side. Our other less valued pictures are Wellington and
Buonaparte between the windows, and the miniature of a dog by H: Wylie in mezzotinto over one of the doors. — . . . 14

Keats never published his poem, and as far as we know its “public” consisted of Bailey, his brothers — and especially of Fanny Brawne, to whom, with a hand less exuberant than that with which he inscribed his Shakespeare three years before, when he began his first sea change, Keats signed over his folio (on the title page above the head of Shakespeare) 15

[Signature]

Mr. William
Shakespeare

as he prepared to voyage to Italy to die. Now, Keats scholars have responded to his sense of the iconic, because they often work with his actual letters and annotations; the general public, however, receives this sonnet through a de-iconizing process of editorial transmission. The folio version is usually chosen as copytext. First it is stripped of its context, which deprives us of its physical relationship to Lear (and to Hamlet). Further loss of meaning accompanies its transformation from manuscript into print. The date is removed, though it can be fruitfully considered a “line” of an autobiographical poem;16 by chance, perhaps, it even scans as pentameter, and all but rhymes with the title (which also scans). Its loss leaves dangling the reference to “This wintry day” in line 3, which thus tends to register as “any day one sits down to read Lear.” No edited version seems to retain the irregular half-line spacing after the octave, symbolic of the chasm that gaped between the closing book of romance and Keats’ opening understanding of Shakespeare, which the words and structural metamorphosis of the sonnet proclaimed. They eliminate the evidence of revision by choosing the second thoughts (“our — ” instead of “this deep eternal theme”). And even if they are thorough enough to retain the rejected readings in the (usually unread) textual notes, they have removed the immediate evidence of revision in the icon — as if the tension between these readings symbolizing the poet’s doubt and certainties were only evidence for constructing the text and not the text itself. Editors substitute a mere terminus for the various esthetic finalities of the layered stages of the poem’s deposit.

No editor seems to give a hint of the underlinings of the facsimile text of Lear, which may be essential glosses on what Keats meant when he said “reading” and “again” in his title. Keats read Lear with his pen, not just his eyes, projecting, it seems, his own mental landscapes into it,
and allegorizing his life by it — as this night, like many,

Enter Edgar, and Foole.

Edg. Fathom, and halfe, Fathom and halfe; poore Tom.
Foole. Come not in heere Nuncle, here's a spir't, helpe me, helpe me.

when he sat up nursing his brother Tom, who had been with him at the Cliff, reading lines from Pope's Homer, and was now at the verge of death by consumption. Again and again we see that art and life are whole cloth for Keats. This is so not only for his own life, but for the master's. Shakespeare, he expounded, led a life of allegory; his works were the commentary on it. The editing and publishing of Keats proceeds as if this integration of art and life, were not so, or were incidental; editors have elevated text from context, extracted word from flesh, and redeemed the poem from the host of its meanings. Laboring with artifice, Keats is delivered of the artofficial.

In a rich letter to his brother George and sister-in-law Georgiana in 1819 — one final quotation — Keats draws together various strands pertinent to this discussion. He begins with a reference to the tassels with which Georgiana had rigged the famous portrait:

sunday Morn Feby 14 —
My dear Brother & Sister . . . I am sitting opposite the Shakspeare I brought from the Isle of wight — and I never look at it but the silk tassels on it give me as much pleasure as the face of the Poet itself — except that I do not know how you are going on

. . . they are very shallow people who take every thing literal A Man's life of any worth is a continual allegory — and very few eyes can see the Mystery of his life — a life like the scriptures, figurative — which such people can no
more make out than they can the hebrew Bible. Lord Byron cuts a figure — but he is not figurative — Shakspeare led a life of Allegory; his works are the comments on it —

. . . there is another extract or two — one especially which I will copy tomorrow — for the candles are burnt down and I am using the wax taper — which has a long snuff on it — the fire is at its last click — I am sitting with my back to it with one foot rather askew upon the rug and the other with the heel a little elevated from the carpet — I am writing this on the Maid’s tragedy which I have read since tea with Great pleasure — Besides this volume of Beaumont & Fletcher — there are on the tabl two volumes of chaucer and a new work of Tom Moores call’d ‘Tom Cribb’s memorial to Congress — nothing in it — These are trifles — but I require nothing so much of you as that you will give me a like description of yourselves, however it may be when you are writing to me — Could I see the same thing done of any great Man long since dead it would be a great delight: as to know in what position Shakspeare sat when he began ‘To be or not to be’ — such thing become interesting from distance of time or place. . . .17

When we sit to read Keats’ sonnet in Shakespeare’s folio we sense the immediacy of his body, the position in which he sat, conveyed by the writing, the literal and literary posture in one coherent body which is his text (and their text). Nor can it be an accident that Keats submitted himself to the difficulty of reading Shakespeare in a version unredeemed by editors. If not them, then, whom could Keats have thought to find presiding there, but Shakespeare himself?

Text in the Age of Photographic Reproduction

Our broad biographical vision of Keats has come to a sharp focus on questions of editing. With further development, the focus will be ready to shift, as the title did promise, to Shakespeare.

If I have not seemed to speak graciously of Keats’ editors, I must make clear that I do not doubt their poetic appreciation, technical skills or devotion. The work of Rollins on the letters and now of Stillinger on the poetry make Keats one of the English writers best served by editors. Rather my disagreement stems from what I think must be our different perceptions of technological transformations and of their economic and sociological implications. Open before me on the desk is Walter Benjamin’s illuminating “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.”18 He makes me think that readers — or shall I call us “consumers” of literature? — must reconceive the status of text in the era of photographic reproduction.

In the age of letterpress, from the cradle of printing to this century, when photo- and photo-electronic technology is transforming it beyond recognition, textual transmission from manuscript to print or from print
to reprint involved an approximately linear processing of text;\textsuperscript{19} it was read (absurdly) bit by bit, or (semantically) phrase by phrase, left to right, line by line; and remembered in these small units by a compositor, who reconstituted it in an array of types, from the faces of which a new version of the text was eventually printed. Such processing is atomistic, sequential and linear; but the textual object exists as a simultaneous whole, a thing in itself — but a \textit{thing} — however tradition dictates our unravelling it. The atomistic and linear processing of the book is not a natural way to go about textual reproduction, though it is second-nature, as it follows the way we are taught to read and write. Type-by-type composition derives, rather, from an arbitrary printing technology. It constitutes an immense bottleneck in reproduction, in which the text is exposed letter by letter, face by face, to modernization, graphic restyling, random error, and common-sense tinkering, much of it generated by attempts to make sense of the copy only on the scale of the phrase held in the compositor’s memory, and to respond to it within the limitations of the printers’ founts. The bottleneck both slows transmission and introduces its own turbulence in the flow of text. Some aspects of text, however, are revealed only when it is conceived in larger or integral units — as an icon, or, as typographers often rhapsodize, as architecture.

Since the reprinting of a book required the re-composition of its entire text, it is understandable that editors themselves saw transmission as an occasion for re-composition (to use the word in a different sense). Of course, editing has its own extensive traditions, which rationalize their behavior; all I wish to suggest by linking it with typesetting is that editing is consonant with the means of physical reproduction, and may be influenced by it.

The status of the book in the age of photographic reproduction is quite altered. Beginning over a century ago \textit{photofacsimiles} of Shakespeare’s earliest editions\textsuperscript{20} started to bypass the compositorial and editorial bottlenecks between textual evidence and consumer, and to present the authoritative texts very much as they appeared to Shakespeare’s contemporaries. Michael Warren perceptively calls this the existential text, the existence of which preceeds its essence. For two centuries readers have known little of Shakespeare but the essential text fashioned by editorial tradition, and it has effectively usurped the priority of existence. It would be naive to claim that photography has no “essential” bias of its own, but arising as it does after the establishment of all-pervasive editing, it simply and irrevocably detaches the text from that tradition. However Shakespeare’s contemporaries looked upon his text is difficult to say; but for us to witness the vast difference between the evidence of text conveyed by photofacsimiles and what stands revealed as editorial rumors and irrelevant improvements of it, is immediately to unedit Shakespeare.

Thus the camera anchors our perception of Shakespeare’s text in historical evidence untrammeled with ideal projections of its meanings. (Perhaps \textit{de-trammeled} is more apt, as our education inclines us to look
upon the existential text as stripped rather than merely naked.) The camera does not correct errors, real or imagined, and there is much noise; for the seventeenth-century texts offer something of a riled road to learning. But in art there can never be a satisfactory formula to separate noise from message or to detect error. Such speculations are always part of "the beholder's share," and a reader who surrenders this individual activity to the institution of editing forgoes something essential to esthetic and historical experience. In post-medieval culture at least, the relationship between art and institutions is exceedingly problematical. Readers who will not deviate from the Truth to the evidence on which it rests risk becoming lost in editorial concepts masking as percepts. Our editorial tradition has normalized text; facsimiles function rather to abnormalize readers. Like Keats.

In the first half of this century, English criticism seems to have been characterized by an increasing neglect of textual criticism. The creation of photofacsimiles did not bring about the revolutions, even in academic criticism, of which it was capable. This need not wholly surprise us, as many Renaissance scholars function at some distance from editing contemporary texts, and are tied, moreover, to students for whom popular editions are traditional. In fact the tradition of editing Shakespeare is largely maintained by pedagogy, in which the teacher's role mediates the students' confrontation with art, and shapes it according to various intellectual and social paradigms, which impose ideal order on recalcitrant facts.

With the mention of photofacsimiles of the artefacts, however, I have touched only on one phase of the impact of photography on printing. Critical journals like the one before you depend on the comparatively recent invention of printing by photo-offset; a page in this format can be created by pasting together typeface, photostats of one's own research documents (a Keats manuscript, for example), and then this assemblage is printed photographically just the same as a page of typeface. Like Swift's Academicians of Lagado, who spoke not words, but the things themselves, modern critics stand on the verge of a syntax of concrete ideas, which may endow English criticism at the end of the century with an awareness of the iconicity of text, which criticism largely neglected at the beginning (though Dada was declaiming it on all fronts). Simple laws of economic and cultural evolution suggest the new critical direction, for values trail in the wake of technological alterations of basic media. Not that this fact makes a shift of critical awareness toward iconicity transcendentally right, but such a movement seems now historically inevitable, whatever its own bias; and it can compensate for the pervasive bias of the pre-photographic age of transmission and of the tradition of editorial and compositorial middlemen it fostered.
The dread voice past, let us return briefly to Keats’ text and context to ask what “King Lear” means in the title of his poem, and so home in on questions of Shakespearean editing.

In its folio context the phrase reads most easily as an abbreviation of the title opposite. But “King Lear” happens to be the exact title from Keats’ Whittingham edition, which may have been the only Shakespeare text used on the Isle of Wight. If, as may be possible, Keats’ sonnet interposes between his having read only the modern edition and his first turning to the folio Tragedie of King Lear, then we may observe that the sonnet is preparatory to a reading of a Shakespearean play vastly different from the one Keats had come to know. This does not answer the question of what Keats intended or experienced in his phrase “King Lear” — nor is that question even to be answered here — but it warns us that the title covers a multitude of texts, and raises the embarrassing question of whether even our own use of “King Lear” has very precise meaning to us.

If we compare them, we see that Keats’ two texts are decidedly not the same, not least in their discrepant titles. Besides the modernization of spelling, diction and punctuation, changes in metre, conjectural emendation, relineation, and all that that we must take for granted in editorial tinkering, there is something else that differentiates Whittingham’s Lear from the folio’s. Like all modern texts, Whittingham’s is an eclectic conflation of the folio text with a quarto published in 1608, called The Historie of King Lear . . . , which differs from it greatly in characterization, the mutually exclusive presence and absence of episodes and even of scenes, striking differences in diction, beginning with the title and extending to the assignment of the last speech — to Edgar in F, to Albany in Q and in the Whittingham text, though the latter usually prefers F readings. Allowing for the surface blemishes and irregularities to be expected in seventeenth-century dramatic texts, we can say that each of the versions, The Historie and The Tragedie, is complete in itself. Simply, each has its own distinctly differentiated moral and esthetic natures. This fact is scarcely known in Shakespeare criticism, because even scholarship is largely based on eclectic conflations, like Whittingham’s edition, and very few Shakespearians bother to take each substantive text in its own write — read it, that is, without the prejudice that it is fragmentary evidence of a single lost uriginal.21

This would scarcely do in Bible criticism, where a different attitude to the Word prevails; conflation is staunchly resisted in such multiple texts as Genesis 1 and 2, which seem to tell Creation twice, and the four holy gospels, which are not wholly consistent with each other. Even if those who hold for conflation could prove that all the lines from each text which are conflated by the editors are Shakespeare’s, they still have no basis for conflation; for conflation, by attending to content, muddies the
crucial question of form. (God may be the author of male and female, but their conflation would be obscene.) It has recently been argued that the Lear quarto represents an early draft, and that the folio represents a revision for staging. If this is true, then conflation inexcusably jumbles stages of esthetic differentiation, and creates an editorial standard above art. Editing promises the esthetic, but delivers anesthetic.

However we explain the origins of Q and F, the crucial textual fact is their existential difference; and the crucial sociological fact is that the first fact is ignored. However it arose, the form of the editorial Lear medley simply does not rest on textual evidence. It is true that the mind-numbing collations of scholarly editions endeavor to root each crux in textual evidence, but as for the shape, it persists merely because of the weight of its own tradition, which arose a century after Shakespeare’s death, and — not insignificantly — because it is esthetically pleasing. (In fact, it is better than Shakespeare’s substantive texts: it outsells them.)

With what degree of consciousness of the textual problem Keats took up the folio, I doubt we can be sure. Certainly in his use of the folio Troilus, he encountered a reading at 3.3.226 that made sense to him, but was not in his modern edition — it followed the quarto here, which I gather Keats did not know about — and he queried the arbitrariness of editorial behaviour. At 1.1.39 he attacked a “hocus pocus’d” emendation (which is the reading of his Whittingham edition). If in Troilus he was aware of the role of the textual editor, then perhaps so in Lear. But even if there is only a little evidence of his sophistication in textual theory, there is still the general fact of Keat’s sure poetic instinct, that brought him to the substantive folio and rooted him there, surely for some strong purpose, as the 1623 text is not easy labor. And there is also the graphic evidence Keats left behind in it of his meticulous reading.

If we look at his markings on the first page of the folio Lear, which is, again, the only Lear text he marked, we see he left an extensive record of his attention to details, most of which happen to be variant in Q. Keats would not likely have known of this variation precisely as we do, but he would have drunk in its effect when he read Lear in the eclectic tradition of his Whittingham edition, as in the example, just mentioned, of the varying assignment of the last speech. “Vnburthened crawle toward death” at the bottom of the first column of The Tragedie is part of a section of five F lines that has no counterpart in The Historie (here quoted after F).

To make all Cares and Busineffe from our Age,
Conferring them on younger strengthe, while we
Vnburthen’d crawle toward death. Our son of Cornwal,
And you our no lesse loving Sonne of Albany,

We haue this houre a constant will to publish
Our daughters seuerall Dowers, that future strife
May be prevented now. The Princes, France & Burgundy,
Great Riuels in our yongest daughters loute,
Shak-spere

To shake all cares and busines of our state,
Confirming them on youger yeares,
The two great Princes France and Burgundy,
Great royals in our youngest daughters louse,

Next, Keats marked one F line here.

(Since now we will diuest vs both of Rule,
Interest of Territory, Cares of State)

The whole parenthesis is not present in Q. All the following marked F passages exhibit variation from Q.

| As much as Childe ere lou'd, or Father found. |
| As much a child ere loued, or father friend, |
| With shadowie Forrefts, and with Champains rich'd |
| With plenteous Riuers, and wide-skirted Meades |
| With shady forrefts, and wide skirted meades, |
| Onely the comes too short, |
| onely the came short, |
| Then that conferr'd on Gonerill. Now our Ioy, |
| Although our last and leaft ; to whole yong louse, |
| The Vines of France, and Milke of Burgundie, |
| Strie to be interest. What can you say, to draw |
| A third, more opilent then your Sifters ? speake. |
| Then that confirm'd on Gonerill, but now our Ioy, |
| Although the last, not leaft in our decree louse, |
| What can you say to win a third, more opulent |
| Then your siflers. |

And so Keats' annotation continues for the two dozen folio pages, with no less diversity between Q and F.

To ground my surmises about Keats' readings of Lear in an annotated quarto would be ideal. Q was extremely rare in Keats' time, however, and was not available in facsimile. There seems to be no evidence Keats knew of it; but if he had fallen upon it rather than F, it is inconceivable that his discriminating underlining would not have picked out phrases unique to that version, as in the famous mad trial scene in 3.6, for example; and would have shown thereby, that his understanding of Lear is radically different from ours, who depend on the editors and on conflation.

The only issue that can concern us here, therefore, is actual differences between F and Keats' Whittingham edition. I have just argued from
an esthetic point of view that crucially the folio form cannot be found there — but the reader may find questions of content more persuasive. Now, it happens that every passage marked on the first-folio page is in Whittingham’s *King Lear*; this is understandable, because a conflated edition tends to pick up whole lines unique to either version, and, when the texts offer virtually the same reading with minor variants, to choose those of F. The last quotation does, however, expose the eclectic editor, as he opts for Q variants. Here is the Whittingham reading:

> Than that *confirm’d* on Goneril. — Now, our joy,
> Although the *last*, *not* least; to whose young love
> The vines of France, and milk of Burgundy,
> Strive to be interest’d: what can you say, to draw
> A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.

The italicized words are introjected into the basically F text from Q, though the F readings — respectively “conferr’d,” “our” and “and” — are not problematic. Those in the second line are especially interesting, as they belong to the question of Lear’s “deere loue” for Cordelia in their Q context; in F, where the “yong loue . . . of France, and . . . of Burgundie” is the immediate issue, however, Cordelia is Lear’s “last and least,” rather than “last, not least.” Whittingham’s edition confounds these contextual meanings by inserting Q’s “not” before the QF “least,” which word thereupon ceases to indicate the physical or political slightness of the heroine (which it may signify in F), and substitutes for it her great stature in her father’s love (as in Q) or in his “joy” (as it registers in Whittingham).

This is a small but typical example of the strong swings of literary and dramatic response that hinge on even the small questions of diction in eclectic editing. If we think that questions of meaning at this level are not very significant, we will have to argue it out with Keats, whose variant manuscripts of the *Lear* sonnet testify to his continual adjustment of diction in just such small, but meaningful, details.23

I chose to quote this single set of variants from Q, F and Keats’ modern edition because they are the clearest example, in the opening where Keats wrote his sonnet, of an F reading that he was taken by, but which he would not have been able to find in his Whittingham. One can see without further evidence, that an argument could be made for the distinct “folioness” of Keats’ *Lear* at this point in his growing understanding of Shakespeare, and the importance of this concept in our response to his title, his sonnet and his collaboration. Also, we must bear in mind that if Keats said he surfaced from *Endymion* with the ability to read Shakespeare to his depths, his new perception may have come in part from his penetration into his folio, which unedited Shakespeare as Keats knew him from modern editions.

Another editorial function is to erase virtually all seventeenth-century punctuations, read the text (modernized and conflated) according to sense, and to repoint by modern standards. Editors argue that the print-
er's punctuation was a compositorial discretion (or indiscretion), and
does not necessarily or accurately represent Shakespeare's pointing to the
degree, for example, that the printer's diction represents the author's.
This is likely an accurate assessment; but it does not follow that the
punctuation is not part of the evidence, that it may not be partly Shake-
spearean, or that it lacks interest as intelligent contemporary reading in
itself.

Lest we suspect that meaning does not govern in a thing so small as a
comma, it is worthwhile to give ourselves pause by observing that Keats
actually "stood upon points." Even in his prose underlining (as in Hazlitt's
essay on Lear), but most strikingly in his sensitive marking of Spenser,
Shakespeare and Milton, he was given to lifting his pen at major punctua-
tion and even at commas. Some liftings may disclose merely a need for
ink, but most of them seem of literary significance. My impression is
that they often express Keats' sensitivity to metre (especially caesura) and to
rhetorical pauses, which they punctuate. As only a very broad sampling
could advance this beyond a guess, it may be enough here to adduce
several examples of Keats' lifted pen at punctuation that is clearly irregu-
lar by nineteenth- and twentieth-century standards. Note the "intrusive"
commas in these starred folio lines (No such commas are to be found in
Whittingham.):

* Gent. There is meanes Madam:
   Our foster Nurfe of Nature, is repose,
   The which he lackes: that to prouoke in him
   Are many Simples operatieve, whose power
   Will clofe the eye of Anguihl.
   Cord. All befit Secrets,
   All you vnpublifh'd Vertues of the earth
   Spring with my teares; be aydant, and remediate
   In the Goodmans desires: seeke, seeke for him,
   Leave his vngouern'd rage, disfolute the life
   That wants the meanes to leade it.

* Glou. The tricke of that voyce, I do well remember:
   I't not the King?
   Lear. I, euery inch a King.
   When I do stare, fee how the Subiec quakes.
   I pardon that mans life. What was thy caufe?
   Adultery? thou shalt not dye: dye for Adultery?
   No, the Wren goes too't, and the fmall gilded Fly
   Do's lecher in my fight. Let Copulation thrive:
These commas, divide subject and object; as these skeletal sentences, show they, are grammatically inappropriate:

Our nurse, is repose.
Lest rage, dissolve life.
The trick, I remember.

But in their fleshed contexts the commas can work rhetorically as pauses, and Keats’ pauses at them may represent something of his actual intonation of these folio lines. Whatever its authority, the folio punctuation made its point on one of Shakespeare’s most sensitive readers. Once we notice how thoroughly Keats responded even to the oddities of Renais-sance punctuation, we surely must confess that we would never have guessed how he read the text, if we had not seen the traces of it from his pen. How this man particularly understood “King Lear” and “reading” — those words from his title — are vital mysteries that we have not yet grasped. But where can be begin? — not in any edition of Keats and Shakespeare yet produced. Not to understand these issues is to miss the pulse of their shared blood.

I have concluded Keats’ grand search for mastery of the “eternal theme” in a comma. As I think Keats is a literalist of the imagination, the defense of his art and life could arise even from so seemingly insignificant a detail; and if I were going to offer you a peroration, I would not blush to start it at this point.

In approaching Shakespeare slowly through Lear, and Lear through Keats, I hoped to evoke the dynamics of a literary tradition, on which axis of genius the questions of editing should be seen to turn. I commented on printing technology to suggest why this perception of editing was alien, and why new technology may soon make it familiar. In both sections of the paper I have not hidden my own values, but I have tried to show that they need have little to do with the argument.

If this approach has at all succeeded, it may have done so at the cost of making Lear seem the only Shakespeare that needs unediting. In closing, then, I would like briefly to offer three various perspectives on editorial obscurity, which may in sum suggest how pervasive the darkness is. Shakespeare’s text is all before us.

Textgate

Spellbound: Within the last half century conservative editing has focused on the “old-spelling edition.” The aim was to respect the so-called “accidental” features of early editions and to preserve them in re-editions in the hope occasionally of seeing through the “veil of print” to the underlying manuscript, now lost, where greater authority resided. So far so good. But the great problem is that the “accidentals” were not under-
stood in a physical sense, but were interpreted through the atomistic abstraction of spelling, which, oddly, seems never to be defined by old-spelling editors, although their practice can be defended only on the basis of such a definition. So far so bad, for abstraction founders on the actualities of the concrete text. It can be shown that, as many of the old kerning type sorts could not be set next to each other without fouling and breaking, combinations of these types tended to be avoided in composition. In such problematic settings other types were required to mediate them, types which were compatible with the problematic kerns, which extend typeface off the edge of the typebody. In some founts, for example, \( k \) followed by the ligature in long-s and \( p \) will break both the \( k \) and the long-s, hence —

\[
\text{Shake-speare}
\]

— in which the typographically exigent \( e \) and the hyphen are not necessarily part of the spelling.

\[
\text{This space must be filled with types whose face is without descenders: eg. spaces, an } e \text{, a hyphen, etc.,}
\]

There is more good news. Types can kern vertically.

\[
\text{Du corps, quelque de lea guerir}
\]

Composition with these types must avoid clashes of ascenders from below
and descendents from above when one or both kern. One of the obvious compositional expedients in Shakespeare’s time, in the days before orthography, was to add a terminal e to a word in one line to bring its types out of the vertical line of conflict with types in adjacent lines. Interchanging upper- and lower-case settings could also often solve such problems, by adjusting the alignment as a function of the different (horizontal) set of the substitute type, by eliminating a descender or ascender, or by moving its relative position in the shape of the letter. Now, for editors to transtype an early text from a kerning fount to the non- or minimally-kerning founts of modern re-editions is precisely to hide the equivocal relationship of concrete typesetting and abstract spelling in the early text. The editorial criterion of spelling does not allow us to distinguish in the reprint the material causality of the copytext image. Conservative editorial practice cannot be founded on the quicke-sand of spelling.25

Concordance: Theoretically a concordance is simply an edition of a work, the shape of which derives not from its inherent literary form, but from an extrinsic literal sequence. Now that computers are employed in editing, concordances tend to be made during editorial projects for their own internal guidance. In the past, however, the concordance has been a derivative of an existing edition. Concordances are useful because they locate examples of diction relevant to that of some crux editors may be struggling with, and so familiarize them with authorial usage on a large scale. They are especially valuable for authors who are outside of standard English, like Shakespeare who came before it, and who helped to form it, or writers in dialect like Burns, or idiolect like Joyce. The scholarly usefulness of concordances declines abruptly with any incompleteness, or, if they are selective, with any fuzziness about the basis of selection.

There is no complete concordance for all of Shakespeare’s substantive texts, though people talk as if there were. At any moment this lack can leave editors in the awkward position of possessing the little knowledge that is a dangerous thing. Now being published is a massive, multivolumed computerized Complete and Systematic Concordance to the Works of William Shakespeare, really a number of concordances; and the one-volumed Harvard Concordance to Shakespeare, which is the main concordance of the former,26 and claims to offer “the first complete and reliable one-volume concordance to all the plays and poems of Shakespeare.” Unfortunately no rigor has gone into the definition of text, or, if it has, of conveying the definition to the reader. Many scholars who use it will realize that the Riverside edition it concords is, by its anachronizing and its elimination of text, a significant shortfall on the whole canon. But few will know that certain parts of the chosen edition are not concorded, because the omissions are not admitted or detailed. Most users would want a concordance of Shakespeare, for example, that retained the unique phrase “Twelfth Night” and omitted the 27,575 occurences of “the.” The Complete Concordance leans completely the other way. One may
decide eventually that to the concorder "text" means "dialogue only," for *The Complete Concordance* omits stage directions and speech prefixes as well as titles. But like many classical and modern authors Shakespeare frequently wrote dialogue into stage directions.

From this passage in *2 Henry 6* (1.4) you will find "adsum" glossed in the concordance; but do not look for "conjuro" there. Nor will you find "&c" from this location, though it is glossed in this one (from that play without a title).

But these examples of "&c" are even less possibly dialogue than the usage in *2 Henry 6*. There seems to be no accepted term for these "dialogue directions," though "stage direction" comes closest. If that is what the concorder thought them, then some stage directions are less equal than these.

Not all of Shakespeare is dramatic art; there are, for example, sonnets and narrative poems. Not only are their titles not dialogue, it seems, but neither are the hundreds of words in the letters dedicatory of the poems or the "Argument" to one of them (*The Rape of Lucrece*), for they are not concorded — with the loss to the vocabulary of seven new words, eight new inflections, 50 new spellings, and one new homograph. One of the omitted words happens to be "Shakespeare" in its two occurrences in the edition concorded. Its omission suggests that art is completely above life.

Curiously, the great Shakespeare concordance of the past, Bartlett's, also excludes "Twelfth Night," "Shakespeare," and "conjuro," and therein lies the claim of the *Complete Concordance* to its unique distinction. Recently a study of Shakespeare's complete foreign vocabulary appeared in *Fremdsprachen bei Shakespeare*;²⁷ it too has nothing to do with "Coniuro te,
Modern philology thus affirms Shakespeare's "small Latine," of which Jonson spoke proudly in 1623. Nor does any of these three studies include "THRENOS"—Shakespeare's "lesse Greeke"—which occurs in the auspicious location after line 52 of "The Phoenix and Turtle." As the Greek word is, like titles and stage directions, not assigned a line number in the Riverside edition, we may suspect that its editorial enumeration plays a subtle role in the concorder's criterion of text.

I gather that "Puer" is not part of the foreign vocabulary of Titus Andronicus, though the edition I am reading (admittedly a very old fashioned one, propped here on a bundle of xerces of manuscript underlinings by Keats, my right foot rather askew upon the computer terminal) has it. In my text it occurs in the speech prefixes, suggesting that the self-conscious Latinity of the dialogue of this play pushes out of the picture and into the frame: "Boy," says the modern edition, smoothing the way for complete modern comprehension. Neither, it seems, are Cumalijs and Ambo part of Shakespeare's foreign vocabulary, though I saw them in one of these books a moment ago.

In fairness I should acknowledge that the lack of Shakespearean vocabulary is made up by the inclusion of some words that are not in his text, like craggy, Dowland, solfull'st, Pandion, skips, Spenser, tereu and unlac'd. I am sorry that some personal favorites were not concorded; I am very partial to Milton's "Star-ypointing" from his verse in the second folio, and to Jonson's "shake a Stage" and "shake a Lance" from his verse in the first. But one cannot have everything in a complete concordance.

Dramatic personae: Very few of Shakespeare's substantive texts have dramatis personae lists. Editors since Rowe in 1709 have made them part of the text, ranking and characterizing the roles hierarchically, men above women, gentle above common, all neat and proper, with their relationships detailed just as Shakespeare would want it. Looming into the edited text, this increscence seems a kind of editorial paradigm, a potential, the dynamic of which is played out by the subsequent text. Occasionally the subsequent text fails to use quite the proper names, and so editors have been quick to correct the poet, as in this example from All's Well in the unique substantive text, the folio.

```
Con. You have discharg'd this honestlie, keepe it to your selfe, manie like lihoods inform'd mee of this before, which hung so totting in the balance, that I could neither beleue nor misdoubt: praine you leave mee, all this in your bosome, and I thanke you for your honest care: I will speake with you further anon.

Exit Steward.
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```
Enter Helen.
```

```
Old.Con. Even so it vvas with me when I was yonge:
If euery we are natures, these are ours,this thyme
```
Doth to our role of youth rightlie belong
Our bloud to vs, this to our bloud is borne,
It is the show, and seale of natures truth,
Where loves strong passion is impreft in youth,
By our remembrances of daies forgon,
Such were our faults, or then we thought them none,
Her ets is sikte on't, I obserue her now.

There is only one speaker here, her speech punctuated by an exit and entrance of other characters. She is named again, and renamed at that, in the middle of her speech around these theatrical events, and a corresponding change of theme. The Countess becomes "Old" precisely when she sees young Hellen and recalls her own youth. Correcting Shakespeare's mistake, editors eliminate the "Old." and the second prefix.

The same kind of shift for the Countess (if this is to be her name) occurs in a setting by another compositor — a fact that allows us to rule out compositorial causes of these varying names.28

Hel. Looke on his Letter Madam, here's my Pasport.

When thou cannot get the Ring upon my finger, which you r
shall come off, and thou see a childe begotten of thy bose,
that I am father too, then call me husband; but in such a then,
I write a Neuer.
This is a dreadfull sentence.
La. Brought you this Letter Gentlemen?
1.G. I Madam, and for the Contex't take are forrie
for our paines.
Old La. I prethee Ladie have a better cheere,
If thou engrossed, all the griefes are thine,
Thou robbt me of a moiety: He was my sonne,
But I do waft his name out of my blood,
And thou art all my child. Towards Florencé is he?
Fren.G. I Madam,
La. And to be a foulter,
Fren.G. Such is his noble purpose, and beleu't

Here speaking as "La." or Lady (Shakespeare has wandered again), she is reidentified as "Old La." (and again) when addressing the "Ladie," Hellen. This same character speaks under the name "Mother" (and again) elsewhere in the play, at a time when she relinquishes her son, as he becomes a ward of the King. Shakespeare's texts abound in these polynomials, but as the editors have hidden all trace of them, the Newton of their calculation has yet to appear. (For Keats, however, the apple would have fallen; in his folio Lear speeches are assigned to the same role under the titles Edmund and Bastard.)

By so improving Shakespeare, editors have eliminated from the text its clear and evocative evidence of layering and joints. Not only that, they have added their own junctions — in the formal divisions of Act and Scene, conventions which Shakespeare shows no evidence of having regularly used. They have thus obliterated the text's inherent capacity to
indicate some of its own episodic and thematic divisions and preoccupations. The result is obliterature. For editors to foist single names on characters to whom Shakespeare responded, while creating them, with many names, is to impose retrospective understanding upon text, to seek artifical creation rather than real creating. It is a practice that props up the critical notion of consistent characterization, when it is uncalled for, indeed contradicted, by the text.

Over half a century ago Allison Gaw observed that the frequent occurrence of actors’ names in early Shakespeare texts indicated theatrical functions of the underlying manuscripts. Shakespeare readers now know little of this (although they are, paradoxically, warned that Shakespeare wrote for the stage, not for the study), because editors have removed “Wil Kempe” from a stage direction in Romeo and substituted “Peter,” the role name. Tawyer with his trumpet is gone from A Midsummer Night’s Dream, and Sinklo has disappeared from numerous plays. Gaw shows that the last named actor was a bean pole, and that some of Shakespeare’s parts, like that of the Apothecary in Romeo or that, literally, of Sinklo in the quarto of 2 Henry 4 (“Beadle” or “Officer” in F), were likely written with a thin man in mind. By eliminating hints of the resources of Shakespeare’s company which influenced him as he scripted, or which were his company’s way of responding to his scripts, editors have made sure that Shakespeare is not of his age, but for all time. And yet there are contemporary plays like Antonio and Mellida, The Road to Parnassus, Bartholomew Fair and The Malcontent in which the actor’s own personality and sometimes his name were as much part of the stage business and audience response as was his fictive role. How could it have been otherwise with repertory theatre, unmasked actor and regular clientele? How otherwise in a dramatic tradition obsessed by the interrelationship of theatre and life, of Globe and globe? The editors have condemned such plays, in which the actors’ names cannot sensibly be eliminated, to be not for all time, but of their age. This is one reason why for us Shakespeare towers above his contemporaries.

Speech Prefixity: The mention of type names brings me to a final comment on the widespread misunderstanding of Shakespeare occasioned by editorial behavior. When one bypasses the editors to read Loues Labours Lost in Q or in F, one discovers that certain roles are denominated by both type names and personal names, the principles of their distribution not being immediately clear:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type Name</th>
<th>Personal Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pedant</td>
<td>Holofernes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braggart</td>
<td>Don Adriano de Armado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curate</td>
<td>Nathaniel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clown (Foole)</td>
<td>Costard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page (Boy)</td>
<td>Moth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most names occur in both audible and inaudible text in Q, but the editors
consistently opt for the right-hand column to use in their speech prefixes (though some of them allow these names to be supplemented in stage directions by names in the left-hand column, if they are already there in the copytext).

Some kind of layering of text can be detected in the distribution of the various names of the second-named role. His speeches are introduced with an abbreviation of Armado in 1.2 and of Braggart in 5.1 and 5.2; both names occur in 3.1, the Braggart names appearing in a block at the beginning of the scene, rather than the end, and the Armado names occurring at the end, rather than the beginning. (In F almost all the Armado names are replaced with Braggart.) The first editor, Rowe, used a later folio, in which, as noted, the Braggart name was predominant — but he changed these wholesale to Armado. He invented the first list of *dramatis personae*, where we find “Don Adriano de Armado, a fantastical Spaniard,” — and *Exit Braggart in toto*. Thus Rowe and his followers steer readers away from Scylla (our dangerous propensity to think Don Adriano is a Polish-Lithuanian name), only to drown us in Charybdis (our dangerous propensity to treat the role as unified under a personal and family name). Yet the theatrical type name, Braggart, is essential for readers to know, as when we are told late in the play that Armado’s child “brags” in Jaquenetta’s (The Wench’s) (the Maid’s) belly, or in this crucial recognition (the only time “Braggart” appears in the dialogue), uttered by Berowne when he catches sight of all the characters listed above, and proclaims (Q; 5.2.542):

*Bero. The Pedant, the Bragart, the Hedge-Priest, the Foole, and the Boy,*

To read this line in Rowe’s tradition is to miss the fact that Berowne seems here to be naming them not as persons in the fiction, but as theatrical types, and the name he uses, for this character at least, is the same as Shakespeare uses outside the dialogue. Readers of the early texts of the play can see Shakespeare’s left and hear his right hand, each keeping to its own diction, and then experience them come together in Berowne’s strategic line. Perhaps they see thereby something that hearkens back to the nature of the theatrical experience of the play in Shakespeare’s time, something that can be reconstructed only out of such slight textual clues (since, as is not the case in the French theatre, there is no continuous conservative tradition of acting Shakespeare).

If one reads the standard editorial introductions, one may learn that Armado descends from the Latin *miles gloriosus* of Plautine comedy; one might even be told that the Latin phrase means “braggart soldier.” But this is no more informative than explaining that Hamlet is a descendent of Adam, when we realize that Berowne’s line, just quoted, names typical roles of the *commedia dell’arte*: and that the direct influence on Shakespeare is not the Plautine *miles* but the *commedia’s* Braggart. Shakespeare’s
play, then, is something of a comedy. Concerned with drama as mimesis, editors have forgotten that it is construction as well. The terminology that the editors remove from view again and again is the specific working diction of a contemporary dramaturgic tradition. What they substitute for it is the kind of tidy learning that would have incapacitated Shakespeare if he had known it.

Godspeare

Not all scholars share the attitudes of Shakespeare editors toward the question of textual transmission. Talking to a Hebrew scholar recently, I was struck when he recalled a text by remembering that it was half way down a right hand page. When I expressed amazement at his spatial sense of text (Why not cite chapter and verse?), he replied that Hebrew scripture, both in its essence and for purposes of transmission, is like a concrete poem. Form and content have not yet fallen apart. For example, although the Hebrew alephbeth has no upper and lower case letters, in several places in scripture letters are written out of size; and this feature, deemed mystically allegorical, is, along with line endings, page endings, and even text of doubtful meaning, repeated — "religiously" is the word, I think — with every copying, because meaning permeates all aspects of text. The editorial function, as a Shakespeare editor might see it, is limited to commentary. Text and reading are distinct. In this way the text resists being made to conform to its interpretation.

So be it.
Awe men.

NOTES

1. I wish to thank my colleagues V.A. DeLuca, JoAnna Dutka, Margaret Ann Fitzpatrick and Phil Oxley for their very helpful criticism of an early draft of the essay. Stephen Booth, Northrop Frye and Richard Van Fossen will understand, and Joe Barber would have understood, why I thank them again. I am also grateful for support to the Social Sciences and Research Council of Canada.

2. Quotes like this from *The Letters* (op. cit.) will be identified simply by the number and date assigned to them by Rollins, in this case No. 21 (15 April 1817). I have tried to be as conservative as possible of Rollins' un-normalizations, though, as his notes say, not all his copy-texts are authors' manuscripts. Rollins' text is printed in roman, but I have chosen italic when printing it in letter format (as opposed to the brief quotation here.) If I could have photo-quoted the letters, I would have done so.

3. Rollins 22 (17 April 1817).
5. Rollins 110 (8 October 1818).
6. Rollins, 22 (17 April 1817).
7. Rollins, 26 (10, 11 May 1817).

9. The following collation of the four variant versions (two being holographs by Keats, the other two being copies by Woodhouse and Jeffrey), has been photo-quoted from Stillinger's edition, which modernizes spelling and punctuation freely, and quotes minor variants selectively. (Note, for example, the omission or neglect of the title in the Jeffrey transcript, of which more below.)

*On Sitting Down to Read* "King Lear." Text (including heading) from the extant holograph fair copy *(FC).* Variants and other readings from Keats's *draft* *(D)*, Woodhouse's *W^2* transcript, and Jeffrey's transcript of Keats's now lost letter to George and Tom Keats, 23, 24 January 1818 *(JJ).* Heading On Sonnet. On *W^2* 2 queen of] Queen of altered to Queen! if JJ 4 thine] made out of thy D 4 pages] (Books) Pages D; volume JJ 6 damnation] Hell-torment *W^2, JJ* 7 humbly] *interlined above* (must l) D; the word omitted in *JJ* 8/9 (Chief! what a gloom thine old oak forest hath!) (thine made out of thy) D 9 Chief Poet] (O) Chief Poet *interlined above* (Chiefian) D 10 our] this D, *W^2*; our *interlined above* (this) FC 11 through . . . am] I am through the old oak forest *JJ* 13 in] with *JJ* 14 at] to D, *W^2*; at *written over* (to) FC

11. Rollins 166 (9 June 1819). Rollins reports that the manuscript is somewhat unclear and "clouded." actually reads "couded."

12. The problem of self-assessment before Shakespeare and confrontation with him can be seen in more detail by considering draft D, collated in footnote 9 by Stillinger. In the deleted line between lines 8 and 9 ("Chief! what a gloom thine old oak forest hath!") the oak forest ("gloomy in D only) is specifically the Chief's, or the Chiefian's, to cite another word in this draft — words of unparticularized authority, unlike "Chief Poet." In the folio version, however, the gloom lifts, and the forest is shared with the Clouds of Albion (if indeed the forest is to be associated here with either of them, as it is "the" not "their" oak forest). Thus a specifically Shakespearean darkness seems lightened in the later drafts by projecting some of it up onto a transcendent national identity, which Keats and Shakespeare can share (o happy thought) equally, as in "our eternal theme."

I gather that the phrasing of the early stages of D can be reconstructed to look like this:

... for once again, the fierce dispute 5
... humbly
Must I burn through, once more must I assay 7
The bitter-sweet . . . 8

The originally repeated "must I" suggests compulsion; the deletion of the second use does not totally eliminate either the suggestion or the diction of compulsion at the end of line 7, for the clause beginning there lacks a subject and verb, and the only ones available to fill in the ellipsis are "must I." Nevertheless, the replacement of "must I" with "humbly" suggests a movement from the seemingly outward compulsion to the inner virtue of humility, with regard to which it is somewhat paradoxical, and prepares us well for the immediate oxymoron, "bitter-sweet."
The tension between flying to or at his desire seems to have been a question only in the latest stage of composition.


15. All the illustrations of Keats’ markings in his folio are reproduced (not to size) from the original by permission of the London Borough of Camden from the collection at Keats House, Hampstead, to whose Director, Mr. F. D. Cole, and Assistant Curator, Mrs. C. M. Gee, I wish to express my sincerest thanks. I am grateful also to Steve Jaunzems for photoprocessing and to Felix Fonteyn for the negatives.

16. A parallel may support my contention. Joyce’s autobiographical A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man comes to a close in diary form. Here the hero chronicles his escape from Ireland over the sea. The book ends like this:

27 April: Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead.

Dublin 1904
Trieste 1914

The question is whether the terminal references to Dublin and Trieste are part of the Portrait or part of its frame. The answer is that the question is biased against “authorbiography.” A similar problem arises in the paintings of Seurat (his Un Dimanche d’Été à l’Île de la Grande Jatte, for example), in which he actually paints the frame around the subject. It is not a trompe l’œil border, but a reversal of adjacent interior coloration in the same pointillistic style as the framed. The frame thus refuses to delimit the artefact by its inner edge.


18. The essay appeared in 1936, and is available with others by Benjamin in Hannah Arendt, ed., Illuminations, New York, [1968].

19. I say “approximately” because I am thinking of setting by formes. In quarto one might set pages 2, 3, 6 and 7, and then 1, 4, 5, 8.

20. Shakespeare’s manuscripts seem all to be lost.


22. Spurgeon, op. cit., pp. 48-49. The folio 1 Henry 4 also shows signs of Keats’ collation, presumably with his Wittingham.


24. Hazlitt, Whittingham Shakespeare and Spenser volumes are at Harvard; Milton and the folio Shakespeare at Keats House.


26. Marvin Spevack, comp., The Complete Systematic Concordance . . . , 9 volumes to date, Hildesheim, 1968 —; The Harvard Concordance, Cambridge, Mass., 1973. The Riverside ed., on which these concordances are based, is edited by Gwynne Blakemore Evans; of the student editions it is, admirably, the most oriented to textual scholarship, and the most encouraging of textual scepticism.


30. "Paul Newman is Hud!"

31. Here is John Smith’s word on it from *The Printer’s Grammar*, London, 1755, pp. 293-4.

The Hebrew has no Capitals; and therefore letters of the same shape, but of a large Body, are used at the beginning of Chapters, and other parts of Hebrew work.

But we must not pronounce it a fault, if we happen to meet in some Bibles with words that begin with a letter of a much larger Body than the mean Text; nor need we be astonished to see words with letters in them of a much less Body than the mean Text; or wonder to see final letters used in the middle of words; for such Notes shew that they contain some particular and mystical meaning. Thus in 2 Chron. I. 1. the word *Adam* begins with a letter of a larger size than the rest, thereby to intimate, that Adam is the father of all Mankind. Again, in Genes. I. 1., the great *Beth* in the word *Bereschith* stands for a Monitor of the great and incomprehensible work of Creation. Contrary to the first, in Prov. XXVIII. 17. the *Daleth* in the word *Adam* is considerably less than the Letter of the main text, to signify that whoever oppresses an other openly or clandestinely, tho’ of a mean condition; or who sheds innocent blood, is not worthy to be called Man.

Sometimes the open or common *Mem* stands in the room of a final one; as in Nehem. II. 13. where the word *hem* has an open Mem at the end, in allusion to the torn and open walls of Jerusalem, of which there is mention made; and, in Es. VII.14. where the Prophet speaks of the Conception of the Virgin Mary, the *Mem* in the word *haalma*, or Virgin, is a close or final letter, to intimate the virginity of the mother of our Saviour. Such are the peculiarities of some Jewish Rabbi’s in Bibles of their publication; of which we have instanced the above, to caution Compositors not to take them for faults, if such mystical writings should come under their hands.