Essay on King Lear: Analyzing the Cause for Controversy from an Editorial Standpoint

King Lear, much like all of Shakespeare's plays, has been a cause for controversy from an editorial standpoint. The existence of both the Quarto version (published in 1608, still in Shakespeare's lifetime) and the publication of the Folio (posthumously in 1623) has created a divide. As we do not have Shakespeare's original manuscripts, this has resulted in a problematic debate over which version of King Lear, and indeed any of Shakespeare's plays, is the 'true', mythologised script. For my edition, I have chosen to largely follow the stylistic conventions of the Folio, but with a few alterations, as I believe that it is what would appeal to my target audience – people who are not as well-versed in Shakespeare's plays; beginners.

In my edition, I used the lines added into the Folio, but which are exempt from the Quarto, because they enrich the script and add an extra dimension to the relationship between Lear and Cordelia, and also illustrate Lear's madness in the short time before his death. I have purposefully left Lear's death ambiguous, so I can give my audience the freedom to decide on their own terms when Lear dies in the script. For that matter, I have steadfastly refused to add any stage directions into my edition. It is my conjecture that Shakespeare's plays were designed to be performed, and not to be read in their own right. Rather, the scripts can enhance the performance, but should not replace it. As Brian Vickers asserts in The One King Lear: "The Quarto reproduces Shakespeare's manuscript, designed for acting, while the Folio edits a theatrical text for readers." (205). It is for that reason why I elected not to include stage directions in my edition. This decision relates more to the Quarto version of King Lear, in which the artistic license is solely down to the interpretation of the reader.

Typographically, I have included the versification of speeches as noted in the Folio version, particularly in the example of Lear's speech, as opposed to the way it are laid out as simple prose in the Quarto, as I believe it is more visually appealing and easier to read. Moreover, Shakespeare has written this in blank verse complete with iambic pentameter, intending for it to be poetic, so it is my duty as an editor to uphold this. In addition to this, I have foregrounded the characters' names in bold capitalisation, so it is easily recognisable who is speaking. The font size is 12 and is typed in Arial, which I believe makes my version easy to read and understand. I have modernised some of the orthography of the original Shakespearean texts, so as to make the play accessible for a wider audience who are perhaps not well versed in Elizabethan English. For words which I deemed to be archaic, I included footnotes to give synonyms to the obsolete lexis, enabling my readers to substitute the words should they wish. I have also used the punctuation as set out in the Folio. I refer to Albany as the Duke, like in the Quarto, instead of using his name, but I do give the final speech to Edgar instead of the Duke. Edgar's character arc is a vital part of the play, and so to end the excerpt with Edgar makes for a much more poignant ending.

The controversy between the Quarto and the Folio, and which one deserves to be hailed as Shakespeare's own version has layered my editing. As Gabler has stated in the journal article, "Sourcing and Editing Shakespeare: The Bibliographical Fallacy": "The textual heritage of King Lear at its manifest source – meaning: in its earliest materialisations before, downstream in transmission, they surface for posterity – on all accounts therefore offers itself already enriched

with versioning potential for the theatre." (207). Both versions of King Lear are as much a script as a study in the play's performance and editorial history, and that is why it is so important to consider both the Quarto and Folio in relation to King Lear. Neither one claims superiority over the other as neither was written in Shakespeare's own hand. I have adopted the Quarto's stance on not using stage directions and instead giving free reign to my audience and allowing them to hold the reigns, and I combined this idea with the Folio's structure – in this sense, my edition could be considered a conflated text; however, I think it is clear that I primarily follow the layout of the Folio.

My edition of King Lear is aimed at novices to Shakespeare, irrespective of age, and I have tailored my version accordingly. The Folio has guided me in my rendition, yet I have also been influenced in part by the Quarto. King Lear as a whole has been manipulated by both the Quarto and the Folio over the centuries, and so to ignore one in favour of the other would be doing the text a great disservice.