Broken Brackets and 'Mended Texts: Stage Directions in the Oxford Shakespeare

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I

It is curious that, whereas modern editors of Shakespeare and other Renaissance dramatists expend considerable effort—and ink—developing and justifying theories for modernizing and emending dialogue, relatively little attention is given to stage directions. On the one hand, this is understandable since little is known for certain about the interior architecture of the theaters, and stage directions in the original texts are usually inadequate. On the other hand, however, these editors are dealing with drama, a visual medium, and the descriptions of the action are an integral part of the whole text. Indeed, for the reader all stage directions—both original and added—are crucial since they will determine what the mind’s eye sees. A glance at the textual introductions to the Arden, Pelican, Riverside, Penguin, Signet, Revels, New Mermaid, and Regents editions of Shakespeare and his contemporaries suggests that in the matter of stage directions editors are in remarkable accord: square brackets are used to indicate additions to directions and unless the nature of the directions is important in determining textual...
provenance, they are not a concern. However, the inadequacy of original directions and the ease with which square brackets and emendations can be added have invited editors to be far freer with the content and treatment of stage directions than with dialogue. While all the editions listed above use the same editorial signals of emendation for directions, there is often a considerable difference in the degree of information provided as well as in the information itself. Although the rationale behind these decisions is rarely given, it is worth considering whether the editor has a particular reader in mind as he or she works and if this affects the treatment of stage directions. The problem is that in reality Renaissance playtexts must serve not only the person with a general interest but also the student and the academic—not to mention the actor and director. Thus an editor must or should take this into account when emending both dialogue and directions, despite the fact that it is questionable whether it is possible to prepare an edition that will satisfy the different needs of all these potential users. The recent publication of the Oxford William Shakespeare: The Complete Works provides a particularly good opportunity to explore these related issues.

Certainly, for one who has become used to the conventional signals of editorial emendations to stage directions, reading a play in the Complete Works can be a disconcerting experience. Not only have the square brackets indicating additions to directions in the original text(s) disappeared, but to discover when such changes have been made, the reader must consult a separate volume, the Oxford Textual Compan
ton (Wells and Taylor et al.). As well, one must become accustomed to new “broken brackets” used for stage directions that are in some way conjectural. When expected signals are absent and new ones with new meanings appear, it is difficult not to react negatively to the whole enterprise. But this would be a mistake: when the initial frustration has abated it becomes apparent that this new edition offers a very readable and easily visualized version of Shakespeare's plays well suited to the needs of the general reader—if that is for whom it is intended.

Probably the general reader will be happy merely to be told what to visualize, but surely students should either be learning to pick up the verbal signals for themselves, or at least be prompted by the text to evaluate editorial decisions about them. And if the system developed
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for the Complete Works makes it difficult for the student to do this, the scholar will find him- or herself continually frustrated by having to search through several sections of the Textual Companion, sometimes in vain, for even indications, let alone explanations of emendations to directions.

What follows is intended not so much as criticism as an exploration of the issues and problems related to stage directions in Renaissance plays and an examination of an innovative attempt to solve them. Certainly it is always easier to find fault with others' proposals than to offer alternatives, but it seems to me that this edition creates problems that, because of the physical separation of emendation and explanation, can easily go unnoticed, even by a reader familiar with the plays. But that reader will also find many extremely perceptive and satisfying staging proposals that should be acknowledged. And, whether criticism or praise is the result, this evaluation would not have been possible without the Textual Companion, which was not yet available when this study was being researched and written. Stanley Wells, one of the general editors of the whole Oxford Shakespeare project, provided me with proof copies of the General Introduction, the Textual Introductions to several plays, and the Editorial Procedures, enabling me to proceed with my analysis.

As I have suggested, it seems important that an editor of Renaissance plays consider the needs of readers when deciding how to treat stage directions. But it is curiously difficult to discover at what readership the Complete Works is aimed: is it the “common man,” the student, the academic—or all three? And if the unannotated volume of the plays is intended for general reading, is it compatible with the scholarly orientation of the Textual Companion? Before evaluating what the Oxford editors have done, I felt I should try to discover for whom they were doing it.

In the General Introduction to the Textual Companion, Gary Taylor introduces the issue of the intended reader several times, but seems never to face it head on. The “editing of works of literature,” he says, “is an attempt to understand the past, and to make that past more accessible to our own contemporaries” (7). The closest Taylor comes to addressing the issue of readership is when he quotes R. B. McKerrow's Prolegomena for the Oxford Shakespeare: “‘There can be no
edition of the work of a writer of former times which is satisfactory to all readers, though there might, I suppose, be at least half a dozen editions of the works of Shakespeare executed on quite different lines, each of which, to one group of readers, would be the best edition possible' " (3). Taylor agrees, adding that "[n]o edition of Shakespeare can or should be definitive. Of the variety of possible and desirable undefinitive editions, one asks only that they define their own aims and limitations: that they be self-conscious, coherent, and explicit about the ways in which they mediate between writer and reader" (3–4). True enough, but surely the mediation should be different depending on the intended reader, as McKerrow's words seem to imply. In this part of his introduction Taylor is discussing both the Oxford original- and modern-spelling editions, which, of course, are intended for two very different readerships, the one strictly scholarly—but the other?

At the end of the General Introduction Taylor refers specifically to the "readers of the Oxford Complete Works" when he discusses the editors' decision to put the playtexts in one volume and the textual commentaries in another. His consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of this decision ignores problems of which he seems unaware: "[The] Textual Companion . . . enables us to record and explain our editorial decisions in greater detail than would be possible if collation and text cohabited in a single volume; moreover, by opening both books it should be possible to make text and collations simultaneously available (which cannot be done when collations are placed at the back of a text and can only be reached by flipping back and forth)" (61). Certainly this is true, but the cumbersomeness and cost of two substantial books seem virtually to eliminate most general readers and students as users and make it likely that only the scholar will want both.

The intended reader of the Complete Works is more clearly defined by Stanley Wells in Re-editing Shakespeare for the Modern Reader, a collection of four lectures in which he sets out his editorial principles and the reasons for them. In the third chapter, "The Editor and the Theatre: Editorial Treatment of Stage Directions," Wells addresses the subject that will be the focus of the analysis to follow here, and I shall return to his discussion later. We can infer the nature of the Complete Works and its readers when Wells says that "few, if any, of the new
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directions in the *Complete Oxford Shakespeare* will be different in kind from those to which readers of scholarly editions are accustomed" (76–77). Later Wells says, “I think that non-Shakespearian additions in a scholarly edition should be in language which does not jar with what surrounds it, but which is, so far as possible, intelligible to the modern reader” (77). In the penultimate paragraph he comes more directly to the point concerning both readership and the treatment of stage directions, which for Wells are related issues:

I qualified what I just said with the phrase “in a scholarly edition”. Again we need to recognize that plays may properly be edited in different ways to suit different readers. I am assuming that our editions [*Complete Works* and *Oxford English Texts*] will be used mainly by students and scholars with a concern for authenticity. We shall not print square brackets to signal alterations or additions to directions when we believe that they are indisputable: when they merely regularize names, for instance, or when they indicate action which is indisputably required by the text. I find square brackets an irritating distraction, and I think that their use inhibits editors from providing necessary information. (78)

Wells cites McKerrow to defend the omission of square brackets: “Even McKerrow, in his plans for a designedly conservative edition, clearly had reservations about their use: ‘I do not defend them in the stage directions on any logical grounds. They are simply a matter of convenience. If it is understood that a bracketed name or direction is not in the copy-texts, this will in practice often save much space in the collation notes’ (pp. 50–1).” Wells adds that in the *Oxford English Texts* editions same-page collation notes will make alterations and additions “readily identifiable” (78). But not as identifiable, it seems to me, as when they are signaled by square brackets in the text of the play itself, as is done in the Arden editions, which also collate them below. Concerning the *Complete Works* Wells says, “[W]e shall rely more on the reader’s confidence, but the *Textual Companion* will print all the directions of the relevant early edition or editions, so again it will be possible for the interested reader to see where changes have been made” (78). This seems to me to miss the point: as a teacher and student of the plays, I want to know as I am reading where emendations have been made to the original text, whatever its authority. And, as I
hope to show, for a user of this edition whose research focuses on staging and therefore stage directions, the methods adopted by the Oxford editors create special difficulties.

Wells's detailed consideration of stage directions apart from other aspects of the text is a welcome and thorough review of the peculiar problems posed by absent or inadequate stage directions in Renaissance plays. Since the plays were written to be rehearsed and then performed, the particulars of staging were developed during that process and rarely survive in written form—if they were ever committed to paper. As Wells notes, this problem is especially acute in Shakespeare's plays, since as a member of the company he was present to tell his fellow players what to do as they spoke his words, if the dialogue did not make the actions obvious. The players, in turn, probably suggested pieces of business to him. As well, changes from Shakespeare's proposed staging were surely made by himself or others as practical considerations made them necessary. In other words, the provenance of even those stage directions present in the extant texts is uncertain. Furthermore, inaccuracies in foul papers suggest that just because it was written down does not mean it was done, and directions in scribal transcripts may not be authorial.

What all this means is that an editor is probably justified in claiming and taking an extra degree of freedom when emending or adding stage directions. And every Shakespeare play requires the addition of some basic stage directions and the correction of others to bring them into conformity with implications in the dialogue. Most modern editors go much further, following a standard set down by McKerrow and quoted by Wells: "[F]or the great majority of those adults [the general reader] who now read Shakespeare, the "best" text... is likely to be one completely modernized both in spelling and punctuation, with full stage directions aiding them to visualize the action as it would be if staged by a reasonably conservative producer."

Wells concurs, but adds his view that, "once the decision has been made to pass beyond 'diplomatic' editing and to alter and add directions, there is no reason to make any distinction between the needs of a general reader and those of a specialist" (Re-editing 66). Certainly Wells is right that the textual critic, among others, is probably "no less lacking in the visual imagination required to infer action from dialogue" than any "general
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reader" (66), but this premise, it seems to me, fails to consider that while the general reader reads Shakespeare out of general interest and to get a general sense of the play in a modern performance, the specialist, particularly one interested in staging, often studies the play for relationships between what was said and done in an original performance. Thus, while it is helpful to know how an editor believes it might be or have been done, one also wants some indication both that a stage direction is an alteration or addition to the original and what the reasons for the emendation are. One of Wells's editorial principles is to "be rather bolder than most of us have been about acting on our own judgement, without requiring editorial precedent" (Re-editing 76). And while it must be agreed that past practice should be more open to question and revision than has been the case, surely when such changes are made, or totally new directions added—conjecturally or not—some discussion of the matter is required. But there are occasions when the curious specialist refers to the Textual Companion to check what seems to be a new direction and finds only the cryptic, "This edition; not in QF"

II

In what follows close attention will be given to King Lear; and then reference will be made to particular staging suggestions in Richard II, 1 Henry IV, The Tempest, Othello, Troilus and Cressida, and Richard III. This procedure is not intended to suggest that these are the only plays offering material for analysis, nor that King Lear presents the most problems; neither do I want to imply that these plays are necessarily representative of the Oxford Complete Works as a whole. The choice of King Lear has been determined partly because Stanley Wells has provided me with the textual notes for the play, and partly because it happens that the play offers an opportunity to discuss many of the problems with stage directions alluded to above that recur through the edition, as my discussion of specific aspects of the other plays in section three should indicate. My aim is to note such matters as where the Oxford version differs from others, how the stage direction in question is treated, what support there is for it, and how it affects our sense of the action or character, or our overall interpretation. For purposes of
comparison I have used the Arden, Riverside, and Pelican editions, and, in the cases of 1 Henry IV, Troilus and Cressida, and The Tempest, the Oxford English Texts single-volume editions as well. While the Complete Works prints both the first quarto and the Folio versions of King Lear in full, for reasons to be discussed below a consideration of the stage directions need not be concerned with both. The Folio text is the one referred to here.5

When one is looking specifically for differences between the Oxford and other editions, interesting new possibilities concerning never-before-questioned actions can become apparent. Such is the case with the first exit in King Lear, when, after the opening conversation between Kent, Gloucester, and Edmund, Lear enters and tells Gloucester to “Attend the lords of France and Burgundy” and Gloucester responds, “I shall, my lord” (1.1.34–35). The Folio and the Complete Works have “Exit”; in this they are alone. To my knowledge all editors since Edward Capell (1768) have Edmund exit with his father. While I have suggested above that a problem in the Oxford is that emendations to original texts are added without explanation, here a long-accepted exit is omitted. Surely the difference between Edmund staying or leaving is significant enough to warrant discussion, but the textual notes to the quarto version merely acknowledge Capell’s emendation. If Edmund stays he is a mute, observing presence on stage until all but France and the three sisters exit (line 266.1). This presents interesting problems and possibilities: on the one hand any actor and director must decide what Edmund does, how he reacts during Lear’s love-contest; but on the other, Edmund’s commentary on the “excellent foppery of the world” has even more bite if he has just seen it in action. So I want to know why the Oxford editor departs from accepted practice.

During Edmund’s commentary on superstition an example of a “conjectural emendation” occurs. “—O, these eclipses do portend these divisions” is preceded by “[He reads a book]” (1.2.134, 133.1). Presumably the support for this is to be found when Edmund tells Edgar “of a prediction I read this other day…” (lines 138–39). But why should this even raise the possibility that he is reading it again now? Are we to look for a connection between the contents of the letter Edmund gives Gloucester and those of the book, inferring that the one is as specious as the other? The textual notes are silent on the matter.
In the scene when Edmund sets up his fight with Edgar the Oxford edition adds business that, it seems to me, would have created unnecessary problems, at least on the Renaissance stage as we believe it to have been. On one of several occasions through the Complete Works when a new use of the gallery is suggested we find, "[Enter Edgar at a window above]," as Edmund is unfolding his plot to us. At "Brother, a word, descend. Brother, I say," we read, "[Edgar climbs down]," while Edmund continues speaking to him (2.1.15.1–19.1). The quarto textual notes provide an interesting insight into how the Oxford editors have taken dialogue literally when adding stage directions, creating problems where none would otherwise exist.

That Edgar is 'above' seems evident from Edmund's call to him to 'descend'; but no time is allotted (as usually happens) for Edgar to descend by the tiring-house steps. If Shakespeare had wanted the usual staging, he could easily have provided it by having Edmund call Edgar . . . before addressing the audience for three lines ('My father . . . fortune helpe'). It thus appears that Shakespeare deliberately forwent the usual technical expedient, and this implies that he did not want the usual staging. It would be natural—and dramatically effective—for Edgar in these circumstances simply to climb over the upper stage railing and jump or climb down to the main stage, with or without Edmund's help.

If so, this staging would be very rare; but Edgar need not be seen above at all since he does not speak until he joins Edmund on the main stage. Surely there are enough staging problems without creating new ones based on dialogue that could as easily have been intended to establish Edgar's whereabouts without the necessity of having him appear above.

The next major piece of stage business is with the stocks, and here too the Complete Works offers a conjectural staging that differs from previous versions and subtly alters the dynamics of the scene. Cornwall twice says "Fetch forth the stocks" (2.2.122, 129). After the first time the Oxford editor adds the direction "[Exeunt some servants];" the second time "[calling]" is added, suggesting that Cornwall's impatience to punish Kent is what causes him to repeat the command. The textual notes provide no discussion of this conjecture, and to my knowledge no previous editor has offered it. Neither, however, do other editors speculate on why Cornwall gives the same order twice; the lines are...
usually left without stage directions or comment. By making the staging more specific, the Oxford conjecture calls attention to the repetition and prompts a consideration of what else it might imply. The absence of information in other editions prompts the inference that Cornwall calls off stage both times and servants within finally enter with the stocks shortly after the second command. But the Oxford direction for servants on stage to go off raises an interesting possibility. According to the Folio—but not the quarto—servants enter with Cornwall and the others (2.2.41.1–3); thus he could well be giving them the order. The question is whether they obey him the first time he speaks or are hesitant and must be commanded again—perhaps in anticipation of the servant's actual refusal to obey Cornwall in the blinding scene. Since all three interpretations of the evidence, and therefore all three versions of the staging, seem equally possible, when an editorial decision is made to add to the original text some explanation seems necessary. After all, the "[s]pecially designed brackets [to] identify conjectural stage directions" do not indicate exactly what is conjectural, the actual direction or merely its location, and without a textual note a reader—general or otherwise—has no way of knowing without checking this version against others.

At the end of Kent's soliloquy in the stocks the Oxford editor makes another departure from usual practice; one that prompts a new awareness of the visual element and its implications. It is customary to treat Edgar's speech as a new scene, separate from what comes before and after, but, as the Folio and Oxford texts indicate, it is not. The stage is not cleared when Edgar enters nor when he exits, since Kent is on stage asleep in the stocks throughout Edgar's self-pitying speech, providing a silent but eloquent commentary. Thus whereas act 2 usually has four scenes, the Oxford version has only two; this raises difficulties for cross-referencing between editions, but such problems are more than compensated for by the reminder to the reader of the visual facts.

Since I have several times complained about the absence of textual notes to explain emendations, it is ironic that on one of the few occasions when one is given, there is reason to take issue with it. At the beginning of Lear's "Take physic, pomp" soliloquy he sends the Fool off with the words: "Nay, get thee in. I'll pray, and then I'll sleep" (3.4.27). In the previous line the Complete Works adds the conjectural direction
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“[Kneeling]” and a textual note that this “is suggested by F’s description of the following speech as a prayer.” But is it a prayer—to the “poor naked wretches”? It is difficult to accept that the self-dramatizing “Take physic, pomp” would be spoken from a kneeling position—but perhaps Lear rises here; the Oxford editor does not indicate when he does so. If we go by the Oxford text he is on his knees for the next hundred and thirty lines, something the editor surely does not intend, here or elsewhere in the Complete Works when an action such as kneeling is begun but not ended.

The blinding of Gloucester offers a new interpretation of Cornwall’s descriptive dialogue. The stage direction for “Upon these eyes of thine I’ll set my foot” is “[Cornwall pulls out one of Gloucester’s eyes and stamps on it]” (3.7.66, 68.1). Thus when Cornwall, referring to the remaining eye, says, “Lest it see more, prevent it. Out, vile jelly!” we are told, “He [pulls out] Gloucester’s other eye” (81, 81.1). All of this is absent from the original text(s) but the “Oxford brackets” are around only “pulls out,” presumably because this, like the previous direction wholly within the brackets, is conjectural and the rest is not. Such a staging would certainly make the action more horrific, although one would not have thought it possible—or necessary.

The stage directions at the end of this scene and the next provide one example of a virtue of this edition and one of a vice. Whenever there is a dead body to be got off stage we find the sort of direction that ends 3.7: “Exeunt [with the body].” The reader probably would not remember the dead servant lying there, and this is a good reminder of how the exit would look. (Although one wonders why the body’s removal is conjectural in the Oxford sense.) The next scene, in which Edgar meets his blind father, ends with Edgar saying “Give me thy arm. / Poor Tom shall lead thee.” This is followed by, “Exit Edgar guiding Gloucester” (4.1.73–74, 74.1). If the first example is a helpful reminder, this redundancy is surely its antithesis. As well, the latter is one of many unconjectural emendations with no textual authority, but nowhere is this acknowledged. One must refer to the listing of Folio stage directions found at the end of the textual notes to discover their absence from the original. The problem is exacerbated because on the page of the playtext such stage directions in the Complete Works have
the same visual status, being unbracketed, as a direction present in a Folio or quarto.

In another departure from tradition that makes a subtle difference to the sense of a scene, the Oxford editor follows the Folio and does not have Oswald exit as he announces Albany's entrance and Goneril says "I have been worth the whistling" (4.2.29–30). There is an explanatory textual note: “Editors follow Q in having Oswald exit after his speech; this is, however, not strictly necessary, and his presence increases the indecorum of the quarrel, and (perhaps) confirms his inseparability from his mistress." (A similar explanation for having Edmund remain on stage in the play’s first scene would be welcome.) The view expressed in the note is furthered by having Goneril “[Exit with Oswald]” when she says she will “read and answer” Regan’s letter (4.2.55, 55.1). Curiously, while the editor does not follow the quarto in having Oswald exit earlier, he does follow it in having Goneril exit at this point. Again there is a textual note: “This edition; not in F; Exit. Q. If Oswald does not leave earlier . . . and if Goneril exits here, then Oswald must go with her. However, the absence of an exit direction in F may be correct: her presence, and her reaction to the Messenger's next revelation, could be dramatically effective.”

The editors have made the controversial decision to print both the quarto and Folio versions of the play, with the result that neither is the conflation of the two given in other editions. At least this is generally the case with the dialogue; but, as the last examples suggest, it seems that stage directions from the one have been shifted silently into the other. Presumably the underlying premise is that stage directions are less likely to be authorial than dialogue—although if a direction can be changed or added in the theater surely dialogue is equally open to theatrical alteration. Another example of this kind of quarto/Folio conflation of stage directions occurs in the Dover cliff scene when we read: “GLOUCESTER (kneeling) O you mighty gods” (4.5.34). The direction “He kneels” is found only in the quarto. The round brackets used throughout the Oxford edition are merely a way of separating speaker's name, direction, and dialogue; they do not signal an editorial decision. This addition of quarto stage directions continues with, “Gloucester falls forward,” an expansion of the quarto's “He falls” (4.5.41.1). The problem is not that these directions are incorrect or should not be
added but that their absence from the Folio is not indicated in the textual notes; one must go hunting through the list of original quarto directions to discover their source.

After Lear's entrance in the cliff scene there are two conjectural directions that, because they are without specific dialogue support, verge on editorializing by subtly changing the visual effect. When Gloucester asks, "Is't not the King?" and Lear responds, "Ay, every inch a king," the Oxford adds, "[Gloucester kneels]" (4.5.107, 107.1). Perhaps this is implied by Lear's next words, "When I do stare, see how the subject quakes!"—but not necessarily. With even less reason the reader is told that Lear speaks "When we are born, we cry that we are come / To this great stage of fools" after "[removing his crown of weeds]" (lines 177.1, 178). This suggests an improvement in Lear's mental state that is belied by his exit running and crying "Sa, sa, sa, sa!" (line 199). Finally, at the end of the scene, after Edgar has killed Oswald and addressed the body: "Here in the sands / Thee I'll rake up," the Oxford editor has Edgar "[Exit with the body]," then return to lead his father off, after Gloucester's comparison of himself and Lear (lines 273–286.1). This means that the body would not have been "buried" on stage—although the trap could have been used—and makes Gloucester's return to despair into a soliloquy. Even though a general reader would be untroubled by these admittedly fine points, by accepting what the Oxford editor suggests, that reader is given an interpretation of the scene that is open to question. And, those of us who refer to the textual notes for a discussion of these conjectures will not find even so much as an acknowledgment that they are new to this edition.

During the reunion of Lear and Cordelia she says: "O look upon me, sir, / And hold your hands in benediction o'er me. / You must not kneel" (4.6.50–52). The Oxford text indicates that Cordelia is "(kneeling)" as she speaks and, given that Lear seems to be reclining, this is likely the case. But if dialogue is to be an indicator of action, what is suggested by "You must not kneel"? It seems as possible that Lear moves to do so as that Cordelia actually does, raising the question of when a stage direction is required and when it is not. Furthermore, when does Cordelia rise? Presumably when she says "Will't please your highness walk?" (line 75), but no follow-up direction is given. Dead bodies need to be remembered but kneeling ones, it seems, do not.⁸
Similar to directions for characters kneeling and the removal of bodies are those describing action involving sitting and standing and, as already indicated, for the use of the gallery. A look at several examples of how both matters are treated should help to illustrate the peculiarities of this edition while also indicating that the kind of issues raised in *King Lear* are not restricted to that one play.

The first example of conjectures about when characters sit and stand deserves praise rather than criticism. In the third scene of *Richard II* the Oxford editor prompts a greater awareness in the reader that the ceremony of the challenge is one of dialogue supported by action.\(^9\)

Taking a cue from Richard's words at the end of the ceremony: "Let them lay by their helmets and their spears, / And both return back to their chairs again" (1.3.119–20), the Oxford editor adds "*[He sits]*" after first Mowbray and then Bolingbroke speak the words of the challenge (lines 25.1, 41.1), and conjectures that both stand again when elaborating on it later (lines 45.1, 84.1). Such additions not only contribute to the reader's sense of the ritualistic nature of the event but also indicate how the subtle battle for control begun by Bolingbroke in the first scene continues here both verbally and visually.

More problematic is the suggested staging of *I Henry IV* 3.1, when the fractious rebels meet to divide the map of England. The scene begins with invitations to sit by both parties. First Hotspur asks Mortimer, Glendower, and Worcester to sit and the Oxford conjectures that they do so—which is likely the case. Then, after assuring Hotspur that he has the map, Glendower says, "*Sit, cousin Percy, sit* / *Good cousin Hotspur.*" The Oxford editor says, "*[Hotspur sits]*" (lines 6–7.1).\(^{10}\) This, given Hotspur's restless nature and the verbal jousting to follow, seems less likely, or more conjectural, than that the others sit. In both cases the textual note is merely: "This edition; not in QF." Notably, in the Oxford English Texts edition, which uses the same editorial principles, as is the usual practice there are no conjectures about anyone sitting or standing here.\(^{11}\) According to the *Complete Works* Hotspur does not rise again until he threatens to leave and go to dinner (line 47.1). While it is certainly possible that he sits when Glendower invites him to, it is at least equally possible that he does not, but the stage direction
added in the Complete Works virtually eliminates consideration of that possibility—despite the difficulty of imagining Hotspur sitting for that long on anything but his horse.

A third piece of sitting and standing business is found in the second scene of The Tempest.\(^2\) Again there is an Oxford English Texts version different from that of the Complete Works, but both call attention to something this reader had never consciously considered before. In the Complete Works, after Prospero says to Miranda, “Sit down / For thou must now know farther,” we read “Miranda sits” (1.2.32–33.1). Then a hundred lines later, it is conjectured that Prospero is “[sitting]” when he says, “Hear a little further” (line 135). It seems necessary that both sit at some point since as he concludes his exposition he says: “Now I arise. / Sit still, and hear the last of our sea-sorrow” (lines 170–71). Editors usually do not indicate these actions, and I have always imagined Prospero standing, commanding attention and exerting power throughout the scene, which goes against what the dialogue indicates. Thus the issue is not whether Prospero sits but when he does so, and it is on this that the two Oxford versions differ. In the single-play edition Prospero’s “Sit down, / For thou must now know farther” is followed by an unconjectural “They sit,” and the only acknowledgment of the emendation is in the collation. There is no note to explain a decision that would significantly alter the visual effect of the scene and, as a consequence, a reader’s—but especially an audience’s—impression of Prospero.

In Stanley Wells’s previously quoted discussion of the treatment of stage directions in the Complete Works he says that he is “more willing to add directions than many editors” (Re-editing 76). In the addition of stage directions indicating a use of the gallery, Wells and his colleagues have demonstrated this willingness. Richard Hosley, in his study of Shakespeare’s use of the gallery, finds that in twenty plays it is required at least once (77–78). A check through the Complete Works will find all the uses of the gallery Hosley cites plus ten more in the twenty plays, as well as conjectures for its use in five others. Of the numerous suggested additional uses of the gallery I should like to look at four that seem particularly provocative.

According to Hosley, and to most editors, there is only one use of the gallery in Othello: when Brabantio comes to his window in the
In the first scene. In the Complete Works two more are conjectured. The first is at the top of 2.1: "Enter below Montano, Governor of Cyprus; two other gentlemen [above]." A satisfyingly detailed textual note explains: "Perhaps one or both of the Gentlemen should be on the upper level. This would explain Montano's opening question and add vividness to 2.1.11–17 (which would become a direct reaction to the spectacle)." This kind of observation scene certainly recurs in plays of the period, and such a staging would make the dialogue more vivid without working against any of the scene's effects. Unfortunately this is not the case with the second added use of the gallery in the play, when, to the original direction "Enter Othello" after the wounding of Cassio by Iago, the Complete Works adds "[above]" (5.1.27.1). On this occasion there is nothing in the textual notes to indicate either that this is a new suggestion or that it is extremely doubtful, since there is no dialogue support for this staging and no dramatic reason to have Othello observe from above. Furthermore, the absence of any references to walls or windows—which usually establish the location of such scenes—here or in the previous instance, increases the speculative nature of this unexplained conjecture.

In the second scene of Troilus and Cressida the Oxford editor conjectures that Cressida enters "[above]" at the beginning of the scene, Pandarus joins her "[above]" (line 36.1) to promote Troilus as a suitor, and, after some hundred and eighty lines of dialogue between them, with no one on the main stage, they watch and comment as the various men pass by in succession "[below]" (lines 180.1, 184.1, 194.1, 205.1, 213.1, 222.1). At first this seems to make an effective scene; however, it would have been most unusual to have a long and important exchange between two characters above and none below. As well, there is no specific indication that Cressida and Pandarus are above, and, given the probability that those above on the Renaissance stage were both less visible and less audible than those below, it is doubtful that Shakespeare would have arranged the scene as this modern editor suggests. Once again the single-volume edition differs: Cressida and Pandarus are on the main stage throughout the scene, as is usually suggested.

But this significant additional use of the gallery is less of a problem than what is conjectured for Richard III 5.5, where the Complete Works has each of the ghosts enter "[above]" to speak over the sleeping Rich-
ard and Richmond in their respective “tents.” The textual notes tell us that this conjecture is based in part on the premise that a main-stage entrance would be “prosaic” and “most atypical of supernatural figures.” After considering various other possibilities, the editor concludes: “Entry above would be natural for supernatural figures; would put them in a theatrically commanding position, reflecting their power as the spokesmen of God and destiny; and would allow them to address both sleepers as well as the audience without difficulty.” It is worth noting that even in the *Complete Works* the ghost of Hamlet’s father does not appear above. Furthermore, while Richard’s description of his dream: “Methought the souls of all that I had murdered / Came to my tent” (lines 158–59), does not explicitly contradict such a staging, neither does it invite or support it. Once again a provocative staging change calls attention to itself rather than subtly elaborating dialogue implications.

For anyone in the Shakespeare business the publication of the new Oxford *Complete Works* has been eagerly awaited. Indeed, the Oxford reputation has probably fostered expectations that cannot possibly be met. However, it seems to have been the intention of the general editors and their colleagues to establish new editorial practices as a standard for the future. As the new broken brackets and examples of emendation and conjecture demonstrate, this aim is especially apparent in the treatment of stage directions. And with the amount of time and people involved the final product is clearly the result of careful consideration. This care is obvious in the always interesting and often provocative emendations and additions that are proposed, even if unexplained. For all these reasons I have been reluctant to question the results. If the problems were incidental and attributable to carelessness, they would be easy to discount, but they are fundamental and obviously the consequence of deliberate editorial practices. Perhaps in time the methods developed for handling stage directions in the *Complete Works* will come to be accepted; certainly their simplicity makes them appealing to the general reader of a Shakespeare play, but once again the question arises about whether this is at whom the edition is aimed. These same methods make it very difficult for the student to get at the original text, and for the academic who has come to expect, indeed requires, a more...
cumbersome but more informative system, the Complete Works seems idiosyncratic: worth consulting for its intelligent conjectures but not to be used as a primary text, especially regarding stage directions.

Notes

1. The New Penguin single-volume editions dispense with brackets altogether and list original stage directions and editorial emendations in an appendix.
2. The term used by Stanley Wells, speaking on editing at the Shakespeare Association of America meeting, April 1, 1988.
3. See Long.
4. On this issue see Dessen, chap. 8: "Conclusion: Elizabethan Playscripts and Modern Interpretations."
5. Edited by Gary Taylor.
6. The phrase is from the book jacket.
7. See the textual introduction to the quarto (Textual Companion 510).
8. Bevington also notes this ("Determining" 514).
10. Edited by John Jowett.
11. Curiously, in Bevington's own complete edition of the plays he says "[They sit]" for the threesome but nothing about Hotspur doing so.
12. Edited by John Jowett.
15. See Hosley 81.
16. Edited by Gary Taylor. Stage directions to this effect appear at lines 70.1, 77.1, 84.1, 92.1, 99.2, 107.2, 112.2, 120.1.

Works Cited


