Foreword to Alice Leonard, *Error in Shakespeare: Shakespeare in Error*

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In their preface to what we really shouldn't call the First Folio, veteran King's Men actors John Heminge and Henry Condell established an early association between Shakespeare and error that has endured through much of literary history, shaping not only how readers think about Shakespeare and his writing, but also how critics and editors understand their task. Addressing 'the great Variety of Readers' – 'from the most able, to him that can but spell' – Heminge and Condell presented a brief but vivid vignette of Shakespeare's writing process. 'His mind and hand went together,' they declared, 'and what he thought, he uttered with that easinesse, that wee have scarse received from him a blot in his papers.'[1] Shakespeare's thinking, speaking and writing was, these editors suggested, easy, swift, and perfect. Ben Jonson responded to this portrait with a characteristically competitive kind of spikey admiration, reading the blotless-fluency not as unerring accuracy but as a marker of an absence of craft ('[w]ould he had blotted a thousand … he flowed with that facility that sometime it was necessary he should be stopped').[2] But Heminge and Condell drew a different moral. For them, the blotless-perfection of Shakespeare's papers stood in contrast to the corrupting mediations of printers and publishers who brought forth earlier, imperfect quarto editions of Shakespeare's plays: individuals who 'abused' readers with 'diverse stolne, and surreptitious copies, maimed, and deformed by the frauds and stealthes of injurious impostors.' The editors' role now, Heminge and Condell suggest, is to 'gather'

[1] *The New Oxford Shakespeare*, *Critical Reference Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), vol. 2, pp. lxxvii.
[2] Ben Jonson, *Timber, or Discoveries*, ed. Lorna Hutson, in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), ed. David Bevington, Martin Butler, and Ian Donaldson, vol 7, pp. 521-2.

Shakespeare's texts, to restore them to their original condition ('cur'd, and perfect of their limbes'), and – as they rather endearingly put it – to 'give them to you.'[3]

The little drama conjured by Heminge and Condell of error-free Shakespeare, threatened by, but also subsequently saved by editors from, the corruptions of print, underpins much work on Shakespeare, not least the efforts of New Bibliographical scholars to strip back print's mediations and to restore an idealised first text. Everything we know about early modern dramatic manuscripts, models of creativity, and modes of composition suggests that the notion of Shakespeare's blotless papers is a fantasy – or at least that the point of those blotless papers for Heminge and Condell was less to report a papery truth than to stand metonymically for a particular, and emerging idea of authorship: of the author as 'happie imitator of Nature', and as 'most gentle expresser'.

Heminge and Condell's notion of print-culture as saturated with error will come as no surprise to anyone who has spent much time with early modern books. Books are full of mistakes, and often themselves describe these errors with surprising and at times untroubled candour: the argument of first-wave book historians like Elizabeth Eisenstein that print leads to fixity looks less convincing than ever, and David McKitterick's suggestion that debates between printers and authors were less about absolute standardization but rather 'what degree … [of] variation was acceptable' seems right.[4] One 1577 guide to preaching – 'conteyning an excellent method how to frame divine sermons, and to interpret the holy Scriptures according to the capacitie of the vulgar people' – opens with 'An admonition [or instruction] to the Reader': 'For thy better expedition and furtherance in

[3] Despite their claims to curing, it's not clear that Heminge and Condell engaged in what we would now called editing. For the view that they did little 'editing', see Gary Taylor, '*Comedies*, *Histories*, *& Tragedies*(and Tragicomedies and Poems): Posthumous Shakespeare, 1623-1728', in *The New Oxford Shakespeare*, *Critical Reference Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), vol. 2, pp. xvii-lxix, xxxiii.
[4] David McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript and the Search for Order 1450-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 111.

reading of this booke, I pray thee (gentle Reader) take thy pen and (before all thinges) correct and amend these faults escaped in the Printing.' There follows a list of 64 errors, each with a correction for the diligent reader to substitute, following the rhetorical formula 'for error X, read correction Y': 'for take and driue[,] reade take and deriue'; 'for the whole comming[,] reade thy whole cunning'. Some of the slips ('for ore no Gods[,] reade are no Gods') seem rather striking in a book which styles itself 'the Pathway to the pulpet'.[5] The relationship of this errata list to a culture of error is complex. The reader is instructed to correct these slips, so the list looks at first like a mechanism for eliminating error: a desire for the reader to tidy and prune. But the errata list works by laying out with clarity and precision the errors contained in the book: in this sense, the errata list serves to advertise these blunders, and to establish a fundamental affinity between print and blunder.

Moments of error like these also have the potential to conjure suddenly a scene of book production: errors reveal, in other words, some of the labour that went into producing the book. A careful reader of some (but not all) copies of Peter Heylyn's 1639 *Microcosmos* – 'A little description of the Great World' – will note the colophon: 'Oxford: Printed by William Turner, 1939.' This is, as the ESTC quite rightly informs us, 'a variant of the 1639 eighth edition, *with imprint date misprinted*' (my italics), and the bibliographical convention is to record the date as '1939 [i.e. 1639]'. '1939 [i.e. 1639]' is both a sensible statement of fact, and a vertiginous temporal proposition: '*1939*, *that is*, *1639*'. The effect of that misprint, and of the bibliographical notation, can (if we let it) be powerful. (If we don't let it, then it remains a little fact we quickly leave behind.) The error lurches this distant text into the mid-twentieth century (and not just the mid-twentieth century, but *the year* of the mid-twentieth century), and then back again – and, for me, at least, it isn't quite possible to feel

[5] Andreas Hyperius, *The Practise of Preaching* (1577), sigs A6r-v.

the same about Heylyn's *Microcosmos* after noticing (and experiencing) this temporal displacement, this toggling between moments. At the same time, the '1939' brings to life, momentarily, a scene in William Turner's Oxford print shop: the compositor's fingers on the type, picking up a '6' from the case, placing it in the stick, but placing it in the wrong way around. There is a connection between the book going momentarily wrong – if that is how we think of this dating – and the process of production, usually-concealed, being briefly illuminated.

Literary criticism and bibliographical studies have traditionally found it difficult to tolerate errors – and by 'tolerate' I mean to read errors while suspending the urge to correct. And while the editor's instinct to correct is conceived as a duty to the modern reader, it is also a betrayal, or at least an effacement, of the culture of error which characterised early modern print. Shakespeare operated in this culture of error, and, as Alice Leonard convincingly argues in this book, we need to think carefully, and sympathetically, about the workings of mistakes to better understand the literary and philosophical range of Shakespeare's art. In particular, this book considers error in relation to figurative language, gender, nationhood, and text, in order to restore to errors the sense of literary and conceptual life they possessed for Shakespeare. Alice Leonard's book is a defence of the centrality of error to Shakespeare, an example of how we might talk patiently about mistakes, and also an act of pushing back against a tradition of scholarship that canonises an author by tidying him up, by erasing his slips, by hemming in his loose and errant thoughts.

One of the virtues of lingering over such cruces and resisting the urge to correct – one of the virtues, in other words, of keeping mistakes alive – is that to consider errors and corrections means, inevitably, to raise questions about intention, agency, and meaning that

are fundamental to literary and dramatic interpretation. We think more carefully about reading when we are confronted with mistakes. When, in 2.1 of *King John*, John lists 'Angiers' among the provinces he will offer as a dowry should his niece, Blanche, marry the French Dauphin, Lewis Theobald is on a certain level obviously correct that Angiers should read Anjou: 'Here we have an Instance of … Carelessness in a Point of *English* History.'[6] But who, exactly, has made the error? Shakespeare? The scribe? The compositor? Or King John himself? And if we do – as almost all editors insist – change Angiers to Anjou, are we not denying dramatic characters the capacity to make plausibly human slips, to engage in the fundamentally human action of mis-speaking? Cannot the imaginative world of the play accommodate 'Carelessness in … *English* History'? Errors can perform important work within the world of a play. A clock striking three while conspirators plot an assassination is, in *Julius Caesar* (Act 2, Scene 1), certainly an anachronism if considered in terms of orthodox models of historical time: but the presence of an early modern time-piece in Brutus' pre-modern garden ('Peace! count the clock') can also help us think about the layering of a late sixteenth-century moment over 44 BCE. And in an early modern culture used to the presence of multiple temporalities on stage at once – as we see, for instance, in the famous Peacham drawing of a ca. 1595 performance of *Titus Andronicus*,[7] where costumes from different historical moments exist in a performed present – anachronism recedes as a problem to be fixed and becomes a means to create a kind of temporal depth.[8]

If, then, in the moment of studying an error, we are able to see the protocols of reading anew, what, exactly, are we to do with the first quarto title-page of *Pericles* (1609),

[6] Lewis Theobald, *Shakespeare restored* (1726), p. 160.

[7] Richard Lewis Levin, 'The Longleat Manuscript and *Titus Andronicus*', in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 53:3 (Autumn, 2002), 323-340.

[8] On the virtues of anachronistic thinking, see Margreta de Grazia, 'Anachronism', in Brian Cummings and James Simpson (eds), *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 13-32, and Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (Zone Books, 2010).

a title-page which promises not only 'the true Relation of the whole Historie, aduentures, and fortunes of the said Prince', but also 'The no less strange, and worthy accidents, in the Birth and Life, of his Daughter *MARIANA*'? The spelling of Marina as Mariana is retained in Q2 and, in the reset title-page of Q3, not only retained but typographically enlarged; yet, for sensible reasons, no modern editions follow this thrice-iterated act of (mis)naming. Certainly, it seems likely that 'Mariana' was a print-shop slip for Marina, missed by the press corrector at William White's office (perhaps because title-pages were usually the last part of a book to be printed, and the clock was likely ticking). But to explain Mariana's likely print-shop origins is not to deny the interpretative life and influence contained within her name: we can understand the cause of an error while keeping the error before us. Early readers of Q1-3, or spectators who saw the 'Title-leaf on Posts, or Walls, / Or in Cleft-sticks, advanced to make Calls' (as Jonson, in Epigram 2, imagines early modern advertising), would have been introduced to Mariana, not Marina. In this sense, she had a real presence in the reception history of the play. Moreover, *Pericles* is a play in which naming, or not naming, is both an expression of power (Antiochus's daughter, locked in an incestuous relationship and then destroyed by '[a] fire from heaven' (2.4), is never named) and a means to enable recognition ('My name is Marina' is a crucial moment in Pericles' reunification with his daughter in Act 5, Scene 1). The printer's spelling not only contests Pericles' claims to the right to name his daughter – printing her Mariana three acts before Pericles can declare 'For she was born at sea, I have named so' (3.3.12-13) – but is the first instance of (mis)naming in a play in which names are fraught and powerful.

I have had my own entanglements with error. In 2004, I received in the post a copy of a book: my first book, in fact, *Profit and Delight: Printed Miscellanies in England, 1640-1682*; and not one copy, but 6, in a box sent from the American publisher. I picked up one of

these volumes (which seemed strangely slight), and, with a certain amount of terror, opened the cover of the top copy. The first thing I saw was the Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data, which included not only the title, year of publication, publisher, and a series of thematic categories that defined the book ('1. English literature – Early modern, 1500-1700. 2. Royalists – Books and reading', and so on), but also a record of authorship, declaring 'Smyth, Adam, 1946—.' I am not, as I write this, 73, and I was not, on the publication of my first book, 58. (For the record, it should have read '1972'.) My first reaction was amusement, which then became irritation, which then became the realisation that the whole book was precisely about the instability of early modern texts, the tendency for little passages of text to evolve and shift as they were transmitted, and so this was a performance of my theme. Then I emailed the press and said there's been this mistake, it's not a big deal, but you know, etc., and the editor said when the second edition comes out they will correct it; but one of the central truths about academic publishing is that *there are* no second editions. You only get one chance. So I put it aside; did something else; but then, after a day or so, I had a curious sensation: I started to feel the odd power of this little slip. I began to wonder whether, in fact, in some way, it was right.

Alice Leonard's book is an exploration of that power. Freud's influential model of error figures verbal or written slips as buried, nearly-denied thoughts, breaking through repressions;[9] but error's etymological root in the Latin *errare*, meaning to wander, suggests less a model of depth, and more a sense of expansive possibilities – a sense of new lands – released in wrong turns, stumbling speeches, muddled type, and squinting eyes. Alice Leonard's book tracks that potential: Shakespeare emerges as (in her phrase), 'a maker of

[9] Sigmund Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 116. For a critique of Freud's conception of error in terms of textual studies, see Sebastiano Timpanaro, *The Freudian Slip: Psychoanalysis and Textual Criticism* (London: Verso, 1985).

words marked by error', as a dramatist who 'mobilises the rebellious, marginal, and digressive potential of error', and his plays become, thanks to her exposition, spaces in which '"the good, the true, the beautiful" are themselves conditioned – thankfully – by error.'