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Veritas Filia Temporis, or Shakespeare Unveiled?

Charles William Macready's restoration of Shakespeare's *King Lear* of 1834 according to his unpublished promptbook

1 INTRODUCTION

The gradual restoration of *King Lear* has already been immensely researched or touched upon by a great number of scholars and, of course, by all engaged in the study of the Victorian drama and stage. However, the immediate pre-Victorian era (often referred to, simply, as Victorian), that is, the 1820s and the beginning of the 1830s, have received less attention so far. The early decades of the nineteenth century as a period of great changes in popular taste, attitude of performers and viewers to stage and literature are most thoroughly described in the works of J. S. Bratton. Her book on *King Lear* in the Plays in the Performance series¹ and her essay "The Lear of Private Life: Interpretations of *King Lear* in the nineteenth century"² are the most detailed summaries of what the text of the play had to suffer in the hands of actors pursuing applause. For reasons fully not answered as yet, it took one and a half centuries after its ill-famed "Ratification" before the play could eventually regain its original form on the English stage. The well-known breakthrough in this process was Charles William Macready's production

¹ J. S. Bratton, *King Lear*. Plays in Performance series, 1987.

² J. S. Bratton. "The Lear of Private Life: Interpretations of *King Lear* in the nineteenth century." *Shakespeare and the Victorian Stage*. Ed. Richard Foulkes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

of 1838 that first run the risk of including the Fool in the play. Macready's younger colleague and employee, Samuel Phelps, later followed this lead and mounted a version in 1845 that contained fewer cuts and fewer changes in the order of scenes.

However, Macready attempted a partial restoration as early as 1834. This performance, both revolutionary and experimental, is only mentioned in Bratton's writings. It has yet to receive the scholarly attention it deserves.

On the one hand, the fact that the partial restoration of 1834 has not been well-known is due to Macready himself. According to his *Diaries*, he was not fully satisfied with his performance and later, as seen in the *Variorum Edition of King Lear*,³ he claimed that the play was not restored until 1838. On the other hand, the fact is due to the relative lack of available evidence that could raise and uphold scholarly curiosity. The single record we find for Macready, 1834 in Shattuck's descriptive catalogue of promptbooks leads us to "a studybook or preparation copy, heavily cut, the Fool deleted" with "Many curious marginalia, some in Latin and Greek." The copy, according to Shattuck, is preserved in "Victoria and Albert, Forster Library."⁴ To my knowledge, it is only J. S. Bratton so far who has taken the effort of taking a closer look at this, in my opinion, hardly legible copy.

This article, however, intends to introduce and focus on another text, hitherto unknown, which may have been the one upon which Macready built his 1834 experimental staging of *King Lear*. The text I found in the Bodleian Library Archives I suspect to be the promptbook of this performance. On the following pages I will attempt to prove my suspicions on the basis of the promptbook itself, Macready's *Diaries* and contemporary theatre criticism. A full, line by line comparison of the Victoria & Albert and the Bodleian copies would be ideal, but this has yet to be written. Consequently, concerning the Victoria & Albert copy I will have to rely on the descriptions of the Librarian at the Bodleian and those of J. S. Bratton's alongside my own photographs.

³ William Shakespeare. *King Lear*. A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare. Ed. H. H. Furness. Philadelphia: Lippincott, c. 1880.

⁴ Charles H. Shattuck. *The Shakespeare Promptbooks. A Descriptive Catalogue*. Urbana & London: University of Illinois Press, 1965. p. 211. The phrase might be misleading: the book is in the Forster Collection of the National Art Library at the Victoria & Albert Museum.

2 DESCRIPTION OF THE TEXTS

2.1 “Many curious marginalia”⁵

When citing the Shattuck *Catalogue*'s brief description of the Victoria & Albert copy, I have already referred to the difficulties we may encounter in case we venture to read it. Bratton, who has apparently worked on it considerably, found that the book, “that shows all sign of wear” betrays rather the author of the marginalia than the performance: Macready's

annotations of the role of Lear are [...] intensely personal, and concerned with the poetry, with his experience as a reader [...]. They are so private, so removed from, even opposed to, any idea of usefulness to a stage manager, that they are chiefly in Latin, with excursions into Greek. The learned languages are an extremely revealing affectation. He indicates by them that he thinks and writes about the play not simply as an actor, but rather as a scholar, and so “naturally” chooses to write in the scholarly tongues.⁶

In her book on the performances of *King Lear*, Bratton refers to the Victoria & Albert copy as a “preparation book.”⁷ The Librarian in his note (attached to the Bodleian copy) is of a similar opinion: it “is not a promptbook, but rather Macready's study book.”⁸ For the sake of simplicity and brevity I will, in the future, refer to this copy in the Victoria & Albert Museum as the study book. The Librarian's reserved account also considers the practical use of the volume: “It records the cuts which Macready made in the text for the production, and its hastily scribbled marginalia relate a few of the actor's ideas and self-instructions on the role. But it would be impossible to reconstruct this production from such a document.”⁹ Having seen the study book myself, I must fully agree with the Librarian that reconstruction is impossible on the basis of such a document. However, bearing Sprague's warning in mind, that “Even promptbooks are not

⁵ Shattuck. *The Shakespeare Promptbooks*, p. 211.

⁶ J. S. Bratton. “The Lear of Private Life,” p.128

⁷ J. S. Bratton. *King Lear*. “A Note on the Text,” p. xviii.

⁸ Librarian's Typed Three-Page Note attached to the Bodleian Promptbook. Not dated but is certainly later than 1965 (mentions Shattuck's *Catalogue*, 1965), p. 2.

⁹ Librarian's Note.

infallible guides to what actually happens on the stage,"¹⁰ we may have a better chance for the virtual reconstruction, or at least a little more guidance on the performance if we study the other volume, the copy in the Bodleian.

2.2 "Marking fairly the copy of Lear"¹¹

(a) *Whose book?*

A quarter leather book that counts 116 interleaved pages, the Bodleian copy is a Harding edition, "accurately printed from the text of Mr. Steevens's last edition,"¹² of 1798. The upper board detached, the title page shows E. J. Lowne's signed inscription with the printed label of the Christie's Macready Library Sale catalogue. Lowne must have admired Macready's achievements as actor, director and pioneer restorer of Shakespearean texts: he possessed a portrait of Macready by Briggs in his collection and his inscription in this volume also indicates his respect for the actor. Therefore the following inscription may well be taken as proof that the book belonged to Charles William Macready:

This (with four similar volumes contg "King John, Richard 3. Henry 5. + As you like it") was purchased at the Sale of Mr. Macready's Library, and presented to me by my dear friend for many years, John Lawrence Toole; thus pleasantly enhancing to me the interest and the value of the volumes.

July, 1879
E.J.Lowne

The lines imprinted on the inner title page that read:

195 Shakspeare, King John, As You Like It, Richard III., Henry V., King Lear, 5 vol. ALL MARKED FOR REPRESENTATION BY MR. MACREADY,

along with the catalogue label attached onto the title page, leave no doubt about the identity of the former owner of the book.

¹⁰ A. C. Sprague. *Shakespeare and the Actors. The Stage Business in his Plays (1660-1905)*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1944, p. 297.

¹¹ *The Diaries of Macready*. Ed. Toynbee Chapman & Hall. 1912, Vol. I. p. 130.

¹² *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, to which are added notes by Samuel Johnson and George Steevens. 1773, 1778, 1793, 1798.

(b) Whose handwriting?

The identity of the person(s) who marked this legible promptbook, however, is yet unclear: there is full marking in ink over careful lineation (in pencil) and also some notes in pencil. The Librarian holds that these hand-written inscriptions come from two different hands: “the actual prompt annotations [in ink] were most likely made by John Wilmott, a prompter associated with Macready at this time,” while the “less legible notes in pencil and ink [...] are almost certainly Macready’s. These latter are almost entirely corrections and additions to the text.”¹³

Although the Librarian’s remarks on the authorship of the markings seem quite credible I am not fully convinced: Macready’s notes in his *Diary* lead me to believe that both inscriptions belong to the actor-director himself. On 4th May 1834 he wrote:

Lay in bed to rest, and at the same time to concentrate my thoughts more closely upon *Lear*, which I read through with great attention. [...] I settled my accounts, and set at once to work on the cutting, and then marking fairly the copy of *Lear* – a task to which I assigned about two hours, which has cost me seven or eight. I have finished it, and humbly hope for blessing on my work. Amen! Made it in a parcel for Cooper and sent it to him. Dressed and went out to dine...¹⁴

On the basis of this passage, it is, therefore, quite probable that it was Macready himself who made the “actual prompt annotations” by ink and Wilmott, his prompter had no hand in it at all. The hastily pencilled remarks, whose form is only slightly different from the penned ones,¹⁵ may as well belong to Macready since he makes no mention of anyone else working with the volume.

¹³ Librarian’s Note, p. 2.

¹⁴ *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 130.

¹⁵ Perhaps only a graphological examination may provide us with reliable information.

3 THE PROBLEM OF IDENTIFICATION

3.1 The neat copy

Were the lines quoted above the sole appropriate reference to the "fair copy" in Macready's *Diary*, it would be difficult to avoid jumping to the logical conclusion that the Bodleian copy is identical with the "fair" one. Macready's lines seem to bear out my belief that he must have had a preparation copy, which he copied neatly on a later occasion. This is quite credibly supported by at least four reasons.

Firstly, because of the markedly short period he assigned to the task to himself, who was both famous and also infamous for his relentless thoroughness and perfectionism. Had he not had a marked copy for his own personal use previously, he could not have been able to cut and mark the piece "fairly" within only seven or eight hours.¹⁶ Secondly, though negotiations had been going on since 2nd May, it was not until he thought he had finally arranged his benefit night for *Lear*¹⁷ that Macready settled down to work. Thirdly, he mentions "cutting" beside marking fairly the copy of *Lear*. The Bodleian copy does indeed contain "cuts" in both the metaphorical and literal senses of the word. Since it is interleaved, the volume leaves enough room for such practical means of the actor-director's dramaturgy. This fact also accounts for why Macready needed another copy of the play apart from his own study book. Fourthly, sending a neat copy to the manager containing the arrangements for (and, in Macready's case, by) the star of the production, thus making it available for the other players was simply the customary theatrical practice of the day, one which evidently calls for a neat and legible version of topical arrangements. To sum up, it seems perfectly justified to think that there is one neat copy, which is identical with the one that was marked on 4th May 1834, and then sent to the manager Cooper, who also played Edgar. This is in all probability also the copy which I came across in the Bodleian Library.

¹⁶ Macready may have started the marking a day earlier (May 3rd), on the day of his accepting the date for his benefit night, but it is unclear whether it was the "fair copy" or not. His *Diary* reads: "Sat down to proceed with *Lear*, of which I marked a great deal" (Vol. I p. 130).

¹⁷ Macready had negotiations before cutting and marking fairly the copy, and had fights with the management of Drury Lane to have his benefit night in accordance with his contract: Bunn, the manager disapproved of this benefit night and raised difficulties while Cooper, the co-manager encouraged him. Therefore Macready was left unsure of the fate of the night until 15th May when, after nearly giving up the whole idea, he finally decided to take it with all its (possible) drawbacks.

3.2 Another neat copy?

Disturbingly enough, however, later entries of the *Diary* tell us of the intention of publishing the acting copy of *King Lear* and that Macready was working on such a copy. Two months after his performances at Drury Lane and Covent Garden, he

[c]alled at Miller's to inquire about the expense of publishing *Lear*; learnt that it would cost about £20, which is more than can afford; at the same time I denied the title of the Drury Lane managers to *Werner* as acted; the alterations are my property.¹⁸

This illustrates the value the copyright of the stage adaptation represented: it was essential to publish the current text of the plays, "as acted." Contemporary publishers often complain that only the acting copies of the hits of the day sold well while the original texts of the very same dramatic pieces did not excite great interest in the public. Hence it is not surprising at all that the lack of capital to run the risk of the publication did not seem to hinder Macready from commencing the work, evidently not giving up the idea entirely. Only a fortnight later, on July 25th, we read in his *Diary*: "Gave the rest of my day to the wearying, slow and unimproving task of preparing my acting copy of *King Lear* even to the last hour of evening."¹⁹

Macready's perseverance remained unbroken and bore fruit towards the end of the summer of 1834, although his attention must have been divided, because of the birth of his second daughter on 21st July. Further from this point, the *Diary* saw a good deal of his complaints on the work being tiring and monotonous. In the middle of the summer he wrote the following:

Resumed my slowly advancing work upon the prompt-book of *King Lear*, and am more reconciled to expending my time on these or any other of Shakespeare's works than on all the *Sardanapalus*es that ever were written.²⁰

Several days later: "Resumed the *ennuyant* employment of marking book of *King Lear*, and by dint of perseverance finished the third act,"²¹ and the next day:

¹⁸ *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 164, dated July 12th.

¹⁹ *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 166, dated July 25th.

²⁰ *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 170, dated July 31st.

²¹ *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 171, dated August 10th.

Rose in good time this morning, in the hope that I might get the start of the troublesome task of making up my promptbook of *Lear*; and immediately sat down to my desk on my coming downstairs...²²

until on August 18th he wrote with no little satisfaction: "Went home and got some tea as I looked over my bound book of *Lear*, which pleased me very much."²³

Presumably, the reason why he pursued the task was that he was to leave Drury Lane for the next season and become a freelancer, hoping for more bearable managers and less humiliating terms of acting in the country than in London where both patent theatres were in the hands of the money-grubber Alfred Bunn.²⁴ Trying to escape from Bunn, whom he refers to as "blackguard" or "knave" with utter pleasure in the Diary, Macready went to play *Lear* to Richmond, August 29th, to Dublin, November 17th during the autumn of 1834 and to Bath, January 17th, 1835. An acting copy or promptbook was essential for touring: the guest star sent his version to the theatre where he was invited to play in order that the local cast was able to, and was expected to, use it for preparation. Not only *King Lear* but the *Bridal* and *Sardanapalus*, his other successful roles and the hits of the day, were chosen for the tours in that summer; the notes in Macready's *Diary* allow us to suppose that the actor was to produce a clearly legible copy of these plays as well for the very same purposes. Before setting off on the tours, in June he began his "work of preparation for Dublin by marking the first act of the *Bridal*."²⁵ Then he ordered a new book of *Sardanapalus*²⁶ from Kenneth's bookshop and a few weeks later he started "to put *Sardanapalus* in acting form."²⁷ The function of the promptbooks in general is further testified by the following, recorded in the *Diary* on the occasion of Macready's return to London: "I had sent back to Willmott [prompter associated with Macready] the books of *Sardanapalus* and *King Lear* by which, I suppose, he [Bunn] learned that I was in town."²⁸

²² *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 171, dated August 11th.

²³ *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 173, dated August 18th.

²⁴ Whom Macready considered as professionally incompetent.

²⁵ *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 158, dated June 26th, *The Bridal* by Sheridan Knowles.

²⁶ *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 160, dated July 4th, *Sardanapalus* by Byron.

²⁷ *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 166, dated July 19th.

²⁸ *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 184, dated September 30th.

Macready's rage was ferocious every time his partners prove short-witted or careless in their profession. We find several other remarks in the *Diary* connected to the fate of these neat copies, scribbled down on his tours in the course of 1834. In Swansea Macready was "disgusted with the impertinence of a man, called Edmonds, who refused to speak what the prompter told him."²⁹

The Dublin engagement provoked another angry grunt on the occasion of the treatment of his precious book of *King Lear*:

Went to the theatre to rehearse *Lear*, which I did very badly, and what is worse in very bad temper. Ridiculous as it is, I really believe the cause of it – at least principally – was the sight of my neat book in the dirty prompter's hands, suffering with every turning of the leaves.³⁰

Clearly, the situation was irritating for Macready, however amusing it may sound today, and this makes it most credible that the copy in question was a neat one indeed.

Thus the promptbook or acting copy, to which so much thought and work was devoted, fulfilled one of its two significant functions: it was used as the promptbook of the guest actor whose fame was the hall-mark of the production. Of the other function of this particular promptbook, namely, to serve as a manuscript for publication, I have no other data. Macready laid up the role of *Lear* in the years succeeding his touring season. All the same, he had attempted the part but few times only: it is quite conceivable then, that he, who mounted a new version four years later in 1838, this time including the Fool, in the course of time saw no point in insisting on the publication of the pioneering work.

4 "LEAR WITH SHAKESPEARE'S TEXT"

The 1834 restoration was indeed a pioneering venture, admittedly however, with a good deal of changes made in the order of the storm scenes and with the omission of the Fool. Nonetheless, for the theatre-goer it broke the succession of textual mutilations to *King Lear* at last, after one and a half centuries. Macready, already an actor of considerable renown at the time of the performance, indeed, not far from being fashionable, was able to bring about a change in public taste. His *Lear*, along with his other restorations, helped establish a new value, namely,

²⁹ *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 180, dated September 18th.

³⁰ *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 204, dated November 13th.

that the Shakespearean original was in fact enjoyable as a theatrical entertainment and much better than Tate's version that Macready in his *Diary* called the "miserable debilitation and disfigurement of Shakespeare's sublime tragedy,"³¹ and which appeared in *New Monthly* in Forster's less moderate wording, as "the ignorant trash of Mr Poet Laureate Tate," or simply as Tate's "disgusting version."³²

Macready's or Forster's conviction was of course neither unique nor pioneering in their time at all: not only the eighteenth century editors of the Shakespearean corpus but in fact the intellectual élite of the turn of the nineteenth century had the same conception. Nevertheless, their appreciation did not receive more attention, if it did at all, than any topic of small talk in fashionable drawing-rooms. Macready realised that the theatre offered itself as a perfect tool to communicate these ideas to large audiences and as an eminent Victorian he used this tool to instruct people and guide their taste. An erudite man of the theatre, a member of both the intellectual and theatrical élite, it was Macready's person that had a fair chance to connect theory and practice, literature and theatre, élite and public in the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

Although in hindsight Macready's success did not come unexpectedly, he personally felt that he had put both his professional and financial existence at stake by the venture. Thanks to his established reputation and, very importantly, his powerful friends among men of letters, his pioneering restoration was rewarded by loud applause from most London papers. The review in the *Literary Gazette* whole-heartedly welcomed Macready's attempt:

Lear was performed agreeably to the text of its immortal author, and was a tragedy, not a melo-dramatic entertainment; a tragedy of the deepest pathos, ending as only such events as precede could naturally end, in desolation and death. To Macready's personation of the old king, we think the fittest epithet that can be applied is, that it was beautiful.³³

Not only the actor, but also the cult of original Shakespearean text received a considerable boost from the review in the *Athenaeum*:

³¹ *Macready's Reminiscences and Selections from his Diaries and Letters*. Ed. Sir Frederick Pollock, Bart., one of his executors. London: Macmillan, 1875, Vol. I. p. 205.

³² "King Lear, 'as Shakespeare Wrote It.'" *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*. Vol. II. May, 1834.

³³ *Literary Gazette, and Journal of the Belles Lettres, Arts, Sciences, &c.* Saturday, May 31, 1834. No. 906. pp. 379-380.

The senseless alterations which have so long been allowed to disfigure this mighty effort of genius, have been abandoned, and the pure taste of Mr. Macready has restored the Shakspearian text. We are not of the number of those who desire never to see 'Lear,' because of the impossibility of the part being perfectly acted: the standard of its perfection is in the minds of those who have read and studied it; and, although we despair of meeting with any actor so gifted as to come up to that standard, it is, and always will be, a matter of interest to us, to see how nearly any new aspirant of real genius can approach it. An actor may be looked for who shall do full justice to *Lear*, about the same time that an artist shall be found who can truly paint a rainbow; but we would no more exclude the one from the stage, than the other from a picture which requires it. Mr. Macready's *Lear* is well worth seeing – it is interesting, impressive, and instructive: in some respect we consider it inferior to John Kemble's, in others superior – in nearly all better than Kean's. [...] Mr. Macready's appearance in the part was by far the best we have ever seen [...] Mr. Macready's efforts were loudly and deservedly cheered...³⁴

While the *Athenaeum* did not miss the opportunity to refer to Charles Lamb's opinion tauntingly, the reviewer of the *Morning Post*, before he joined in singing Macready's praises, criticised the previously published acting versions, bought by the public in the playhouses (e.g. at Kemble's, Kean's, and Booth's):

Another excellence worthy to be remarked in the performance of this drama was that it was acted from the text of SHAKESPEARE. The acting copies of *King Lear* are worse than useless; some of the best scenes are omitted, and with the text such liberties have been taken as to mar, to considerable degree, the force and beauty of the language. MR MACREADY was rewarded with the enthusiastic approbation of his audience throughout his performance, and at the fall of the curtain, having been loudly called for.³⁵

The sole voice of discontent came from the stubborn young friend John Forster in *New Monthly Magazine* under a title which referred to the playbill: "King Lear, 'as Shakespeare wrote it.'" In his usual fiery temperament Forster straightforwardly found Macready's fidelity to the bard's original wanting, and mercilessly scolded Macready for his cowardice in cutting the Fool. However, it

³⁴ *The Athenaeum*. Saturday, May 31, 1834. No 344.

³⁵ *The Morning Post*, May 24, 1834.

was also Forster, whose earlier writings were crucial in inspiring Macready to dare to take on and restore *King Lear*. He noted the following in his *Diary* four months before the performance on reading one of Forster's articles: "[It] has had the effect on me of making me revolve the prudence and practicability of acting the original Lear, which I shall not abandon without serious reflection."³⁶

A decade after his first Shakespearean restoration (*Richard III*), the spring months of 1834 passed full of hesitation over the acting version of *King Lear*. Macready still needed to take heart from his other friends' stance. He consulted the poet of repute, John Hamilton Reynolds as late as May 3rd, only a day before beginning to mark a fair copy in May: "Called on Reynolds [...] who approved of Lear with Shakespeare's text."³⁷

For all his friends' encouragement, Macready was yet unsure of the reception by the audiences and did not dare to include the Fool, for which Forster, young and careless, practically told him off in the press. Forster strongly promotes the Fool, and indeed, he explains its role for the reader and theatregoer:

The Fool is one of the most wonderful creatures of Shakspeare. The picture of his quick and pregnant sarcasm, of his loving devotion, of his acute sensibility, of his despairing mirth, of his heartbroken silence – contrasted with the rigid sublimity of Lear's suffering, with the huge desolation of Lear's sorrow, with the vast and outspread image of Lear's madness – is the noblest thought that ever entered into the heart and mind of man. Nor is it a noble thought merely: it is for action – for representation: necessary to the audience as tears are to an overcharged heart – necessary to Lear himself as the recollection of his kingdom, or as the worn and faded garments of his power. [...] gigantic sorrows could never be presented on the stage without a suffering too frightful, a sublimity too remote, a grandeur too terrible – unless relieved by quiet pathos, and in some way brought home to the apprehensions of the audience by homely and familiar illustration. [...] Complete without him the tragedy can never be.³⁸

The impressive propaganda for the Fool inevitably calls forth the demand for an explanation by Macready:

³⁶ *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 97, dated January 26th.

³⁷ *The Diaries of Macready*, Vol. I. p. 129, dated May 3rd.

³⁸ *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*. May, 1834. Vol. II. p. 218.

Ah! Mr. Macready, why did you omit the Fool? [...] We must again ask you, Mr. Macready, why did *you* omit him? We can admit of no excuses. [...] We say that, though you have a right to abridge, you have no right to omit or transpose – and finally we say that, with your well-known love for Shakspeare, your fitness to appreciate his genius in its subtlest as well as its grandest shapes, and your absolute power of ordering what restorations you pleased on the late occasion, it was unworthy of you to stop where you did, when, to realize Shakspeare's divine purpose, you should at all risks have dared to advance farther.³⁹

It might as well be this not entirely positive reflection and the fact that Macready restored the Fool in 1838 that may partially explain why later Macready, as seen in the *Variorum* edition of *King Lear*, did not take pride in his 1834 venture.

5 CONCLUSION – THE BODLEIAN COPY

The hints in the *Diary* made during the summer of 1834 at the lengthy preparation of a promptbook of *King Lear*, which was at the same time ready for the press and was used on not more than three occasions all deter us from the previous assumption (3.1) and direct us towards a new one. In the light of the latter diary entries the reconsideration of what we know of the text is inescapable. The fact that the Bodleian copy is interleaved leads us to conclude that it might have been meant to be printed and complemented with plates⁴⁰. The fact that it shows hardly any sign of wear is due to the small number of performances. Thus I consider it highly probable that the Bodleian copy is not the one marked and cut in May in 1834 but the promptbook prepared for the press during the summer of the same year.

The volume preserved in the Victoria & Albert Museum presumably served only as either a simple study book in learning Lear's role, or a draft for the neat version (based probably on the conflated text). Whether the Victoria & Albert copy is a draft for the Bodleian volume, it is not so easy to decide. However, there is one clue that may help: the Bodleian copy contains a minor character called Loctrine (speaking some of the words of the Fool and of a Gentleman) who is entirely Macready's creation here, borrowed from a play titled

³⁹ *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*. May, 1834. Vol. II. p. 220–221.

⁴⁰ The catalogue label further reinforces this, the local note on it saying: "interleaved prompt copy, wanting the plates."

The Lamentable Tragedie of Locrine, once attributed to Shakespeare.⁴¹ Provided that Locrine appears in the study book as well, of which I have no data yet, this may lead us to consider the Victoria & Albert copy as the draft of the Bodleian one. Inevitably, to produce convincing evidence, a full, line by line comparison of the two copies is indispensable.

What could be the significance of a promptbook that belongs to a production which was not referred as a great achievement by its producer? Time has shown that the production which was the first step towards a full *King Lear* was in fact vital in prefiguring future restorations and making way for them. It took part in shaping the theatrical taste of the public: Macready went against the tide when in an age when melodrama flourished, he returned to tragedy. The tragedian cannot be blamed for his fancy for the spectacular: the productions that made a glittering, spectacular show of Shakespeare's plays and filled the playhouses with an audience equally glittering came only in the second half of the nineteenth century. Macready, it seems, made his restorations for his own sake, serving both his fame and art. As Forster, the contemporary saw it:

By suffering nothing but Shakespeare to be spoken, he has conferred a real service on literature and on the stage; and by his performance, unquestionably, he has added a great lustre to his professional reputation. We wish he would complete it by restoring the Fool! Meanwhile, let us endeavour to give to him the thanks he has already deserved.⁴²

⁴¹ *The Lamentable Tragedie of Locrine*. London, Printed by Thomas Creede, 1595. Anonymous, once attributed to Shakespeare on the basis of the quarto frontispiece which says: "Newly set forth, overseene and corrected, By VV.S." According to the editors, "the play was also included among the additional pieces added to the third folio of Shakespeare's works in 1664" (pp. v-vi), which served as the source for the fourth folio in 1685. "The initials W.S. on the title page of the quarto [...] may have been intended to connect the play with his name, though whether more than the overseership was implied is doubtful" (p. vi). Malone Society Reprints, Gen. ed. WW Greg. Printed for the Malone Society by Horace Hart M.A, at the Oxford University Press, 1908. - Interestingly enough, among the staged readings at the Globe February 28th 1999, inspired by Nicholas Somogyi's recent book (*Shakespeare's Theatre of War*); the program in *Globe Magazine* also attributed it to Shakespeare.

⁴² *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*. May, 1834. Vol. II. p. 221.