Dividing the Kingdoms
Student Work

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Mini-Edition

To edit an iconic piece of literature would have been a daunting task to anyone. Editing a Shakespearean play would have been the ultimate undertaking, but seeing as a great deal of his plays exceeded a reasonable time when performed, it was a necessary action. As one of his longest plays, *King Lear* faced several cuts to scenes that were critical in content. Two of these versions were the Quarto and the Folio, and it was up to the those performing the play to pick which version was best for them.

For this assignment, I initially anticipated having a difficult time. Surely I, as an eighteen-year-old college student living almost four hundred years after the Folio version of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* was published, couldn’t edit such a masterpiece. But I could, and I did. Of the four passages from which I had to choose, I went with Lear’s Request in Act I.1 33-53. It was my decision as well to pick the Folio version versus the Quarto. I edited both to decide which I thought conveyed the events of the scene with the most detail, and to me, the Folio was far superior. The Quarto version was shorter and omitted details like Gloucester’s exit in line 34 that would have set the scene better. The Folio also took lines used in the Quarto and added words that gave more clarification. Lines 48 and 49 of the Folio were not included in the Quarto, and I thought that they were of great importance to the scene as they discussed Lear’s intention to divide his kingdom more clearly than was done in the Quarto. While I was deciding between
the two, I didn’t realize until I read the Folio that Cornwall and Albany were present in the scene, as their names had not been mentioned in the Quarto version. The Folio was more thorough overall, and managed this with the inclusion of only a handful more lines.

Moving into the editing stage, I found little to add in terms of lines. My timid manner in not wanting to mess with a classic piece of literature is possibly what prevented me from adding words and lines that had not been part of the Folio. However, there were no outstanding oddities that I felt needed to be changed in the first place. The stage directions were straightforward as well, as it is only Gloucester who makes an exit in this particular passage. There were other corrections to be made in terms of spelling. In more than half of the lines, I found a word or two that had an added letter, usually being an “e,” that required deletion. Another chunk had an extra letter like the word “here” in line 47. Before my modernization of the spelling, it had read as “heere.” Several instances required a letter change, usually in the form of the letters “u” and “v.” Line 36 originally had the word “Giue,” which I knew really to be “Give.” The biggest change I made was the word “Unburdened” in line 40. Before editing, it was spelled “Vnburthen’d,” which is certainly not like the modern edition we know today.

My final additions came in the form of annotations and footnotes. The annotations I used were mostly clarifications and modern definitions for words that have since fallen out of popular usage. The word “sojourn” in line 46 was one example. One might infer its meaning from context clues, but it always helps to have the annotation. For clarifications that required longer explanations, I used footnotes. Explaining why Lear uses words like “we” and “us” instead of “me” and “I” was one necessary footnote I wanted to include. Without it, the reader may have faced confusion. The editing process itself was enlightening, and it helped me to read better the text that we recently studied as a class.
Lear. Attend° the Lords of France & Burgundy, Gloucester.

Gloucester. I shall, my Lord.° Exit.

35 Lear. Meantime we¹ shall express our darker² purpose.
Give me the Map there. Know, that we have divided
In three our Kingdom: and ’tis³ our fast intent,
To shake⁴ all Cares and Business from our Age,
Conferring⁵ them on younger strengths,² while we

Unburdened crawl⁶ toward death. Our son⁷ of Cornwall,
And you our no less loving Son of Albany;
We have this hour a constant will to publish³
Our daughters’ several Dowers⁴, that future strife⁰
May be prevented now. The Princes, France & Burgundy,

Great Rivals in our youngest daughter’s⁵ love,
Long in our Court, have made their amorous sojourn,°
And here are to be answered. Tell me my daughters
(Since now we will divest⁰ us both of Rule,
Interest⁶ of Territory, Cares of State)

Which of you shall we say doth love us most,
That we, our largest bounty⁰ may extend
Where Nature doth with merit challenge.⁷ Gonerill,
Our eldest borne, speak first.

¹ “Royal” we used by sovereigns instead of singular pronoun alternatives; Lear uses the royal we several times throughout the passage.
² Here Lear is referring to his daughters and their husbands.
³ Announce the official magnitude of the individual dowries.
⁴ Dowries; a dowry was a gift—in this case, a third of Lear’s kingdom—given to a girl’s husband upon the agreement of their marriage.
⁵ Cordelia.
⁶ Lear’s legal title as King; he is giving it up, as well as his power to rule and the concerns of his kingdom.
⁷ “That I may give the best third of my kingdom to the daughter who is fairest and loves me most.”

Dividing the Kingdoms: Interdisciplinary Methods for Teaching King Lear to Undergraduates
http://guides.lib.wayne.edu/folgerkinglear