
Stemmata for Shakespeare Texts: A Suggested New Form

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TEXTUAL ANALYSES of Shakespeare's works often contain stemmata that tell in a visual way the sometimes complicated stories of their transmission. This practice offers more than just the incidental benefit of representing in a picture the thousand words a scholar may spend on description. It offers a substantive benefit too. As is well understood, diagrams do not merely illustrate thoughts in symbolic representations, they also elicit new thoughts by invoking our minds' facility with visual patterns.

Shakespearean scholarship adopted its techniques for the visual presentation of textual relationships, including the form in which stemmata are drawn, from those developed by nineteenth-century scholars for the study of classical and biblical texts. In this note, I do not mean to question in any way the forms employed in classical and biblical scholarship. But I'd rather like to suggest that stemmata for Shakespeare texts could be constructed in a different, clearer fashion. I do this by presenting a small number of examples from current Shakespeare scholarship and arguing that, at best, they miss the opportunity to convey information more usefully, and, at worst, they inadvertently risk confusing the reader.¹ I conclude by suggesting a new design for early modern textual

1. The aim of this note is solely to recommend to readers a better *form*; I am not arguing for or against the *content* of the stemmata I use as examples. Moreover, nothing in this should be taken as a criticism of the scholars whose stemmata I have chosen as my examples, since they have used the prevailing standard form.

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stemmata, one that enables them to be more rigorous, while remaining easy to both compose and comprehend.



In this note I shall present three examples. The first is Gary Taylor's stemma for the transmission of *Troilus and Cressida* (see fig. 1).² Notice that the stemma has seven nodes while the theory of transmission it represents contains only five material objects: the foul papers, the fair copy, the promptbook, the 1609 quarto, and the 1623 folio. Closer inspection reveals that the promptbook and the quarto are shown twice, each at different stages of their lives. It is of course essential to convey this information, but the form in which it has been presented makes it difficult for the viewer to see at a glance how many discrete material objects are actually involved in the transmission of the play.

My second example is taken from the chapter on *Henry V* in the Oxford *Textual Companion* (see fig. 2).³ The reference to "performances" in the left branch should perhaps have been omitted, since a performance is neither a material object nor a change in a material object. However that is not my main objection. Even if we omit "performances," the stemma shows a line of transmission from the promptbook to the memorially reconstructed manuscript. Of course there may be some connection between the two, since some scholars have argued that the text of Q₁ was likely reconstructed from actors' recollections of their parts and what they could recall of others not available when the decision to publish was made. But there is no bibliographical link between the two objects. The theory of transmission represented here does not say that one object was copied or consulted to produce the other: it says the opposite. That is what the theory of memorial reconstruction posits. The stemma correctly uses a dotted line to show that there is some demonstrable textual link between Q₃ and F, the former having been consulted when printing the latter. But by using the same convention to connect the promptbook with the memorially reconstructed manuscript, ambiguity is introduced, possibly misleading the reader.

My final example is from Jay L. Halio's edition of the Folio text of *King Lear* (see fig. 3).⁴ The stemma, as drawn by Halio, does not use arrow heads, but the direction of transmission is perfectly clear. For brev-

2. Gary Taylor, "Troilus and Cressida: Bibliography, Performance, and Interpretation," *Shakespeare Studies* 15 (1982): 127.

3. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, with John Jowett and William Montgomery, *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 375.

4. *The Tragedy of King Lear*, ed. Jay L. Halio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 70.

ity, Halio has conflated two stages of transmission into one: the Quarto Copy Y was of course printed in 1608 and revised around 1611–12, so two nodes should be shown. But my main objection concerns the initial impression that the foul papers were put to three uses: to create a fair copy, to print Quarto Copy X, and to print Quarto Copy Y. However this is misleading, since the production of copies X and Y occurred as part of the same print run and thus constitutes only one node, or stage of transmission. The stemma correctly shows Copy X and Copy Y as different material objects, but implies they emerged from separate processes.



Rather than state abstract rules governing the new form of stemmata that I wish to recommend to Shakespeare scholars, I have redrawn each of the stemmata discussed above in the new form, while remaining faithful to the theories of transmission they present. The rules will be apparent from my discussion of the new diagrams.

Figure 4 re-presents the information in Figure 1, using the new form. The left column gives a list of all the material objects involved in the transmission. As I noted above, there are five of them, and it is now possible to see and count them at a glance. Each horizontal line of shapes is known as a “swim lane,” a term borrowed from diagrams drawn in business process analysis. As is the case in mathematical and scientific diagrams, time runs from left to right.

Each swim lane shows, in chronological order, the different states of the material object identified at the start of the lane. Each rectangular box represents a material and textual transformation of that object during its life. Here, the topmost swim lane shows Shakespeare’s creation of the foul papers, his autograph manuscript. A little further down, the fourth swim lane shows “Jaggard’s Exemplar,” a particular copy of the 1609 quarto based on the foul papers, which was subsequently annotated in 1623.

Each unbroken arrow between two objects, $A \rightarrow B$, tells us that object A was used to create object B, most often by a process of copying or printing. A dotted arrow tells us that the relationship was one of consultation rather than copying. In this example, we see that the foul papers were used to create the fair copy, but that Shakespeare consulted rather than copied the former to create the latter. By contrast, the third swim lane shows that the scribe copied the fair copy to create the promptbook. No arrow is drawn between the nodes “Copied by Scribe” and “Revised by Shakespeare” since these are different stages in the life of one material object. That information is already conveyed by the fact that the two nodes are in the same swim lane. An arrow is drawn only to show one

material object being used in the creation or alteration of another.

Figures 1 and 4 represent exactly the same information, but in different forms. Figure 4 offers several advantages over Figure 1:

- 1) It allows the material objects to be instantly identified, by looking down the left-hand column;
- 2) It separates object from process;
- 3) By looking from left to right along a swim lane, it is easy to see the stages an object goes through in its life;
- 4) It is visually more coherent.

I may deal with the other two examples more briefly. Figure 5 presents the information in Figure 2, using the new form. Notice that, unlike Figure 2, here we have no arrow between the promptbook and the memorially reconstructed text. This shows that the material object called the promptbook was neither copied nor consulted in creating the material object called the memorially reconstructed text. We have no reason to suppose that the promptbook was available to the creators of the memorially reconstructed text, so it would be misleading to connect the two objects by an arrow. The diagram reflects the reality that the memorially reconstructed text, like the foul papers, was created *de novo*.

Finally, Figure 6 presents the information in Figure 3, using the new form. The significant point to notice here is that, because the theory of transmission involves two different copies of Q_1 , called copy X and copy Y, both are shown as different material objects, each in its own swim lane. The unbroken line between them, with no arrowhead, tells us that they came into existence in the same operation, the printing in 1608. Thereafter, each copy enjoyed its own fortune: Y was marked up with revisions by Shakespeare and then used to create a promptbook, while X came into the possession of the printer of Quarto 2.



Figures 4–6 demonstrate how my proposed stemmata scheme clarifies the difference between object and process while minimizing possible ambiguities. Usually one would arrange the swim lanes in chronological order of creation of the material objects, the earliest object being in the top swim lane. But it is not essential to do this. The two stemmata in Figure 7 convey exactly the same information.

From both stemmata, we learn that A was used to create B, which was then used to create C. The order of the swim lanes is not significant. Sometimes, when drawing a complex stemma, two arrows may cut across each other. While not diminishing the accuracy of the diagram, such in-

felicities clutter the image and introduce possible confusion. However, by placing the swim lanes in a different order, one can often eliminate intersecting lines and thus clean up the image. Sometimes, it may also be more convenient to draw the stemma in portrait rather than landscape form, with the material objects along the top and the swim lanes running vertically downwards. In such a diagram, time would be understood to run from top to bottom rather than from left to right.



I have tried to keep the new form as simple as possible, to make stemmata easy to draw, whether using pen and paper or software. The standard commercial software for drawing such diagrams is Microsoft Visio, which unfortunately is expensive. However, I have drawn all diagrams in this note using web-based software called Lucidchart,⁵ which I have found easy to use. It comes in both free and paid-for versions; the free version was more than adequate for the diagrams I have presented here. Lucidchart also allows diagrams to be saved at a resolution of 300 dpi, which publishers usually require.

I hope that scholars will make use of this new form, which, I respectfully suggest, is, for theories about the transmission of Shakespeare texts, an improvement on the traditional form. 

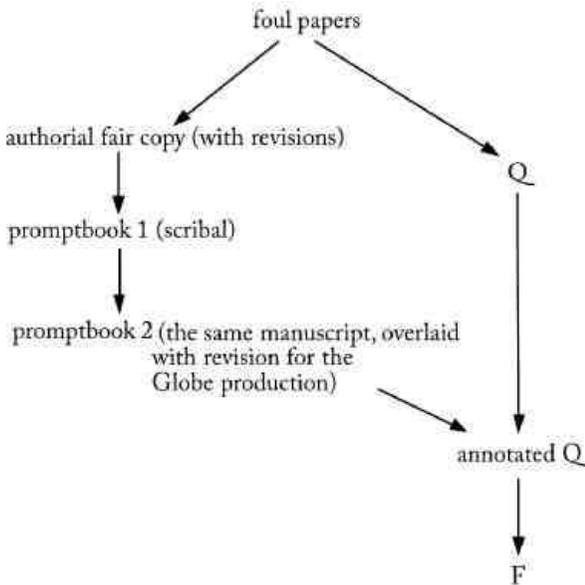


Fig. 1: Gary Taylor, "Troilus and Cressida: Bibliography, Performance, and Interpretation," *Shakespeare Studies* 15 (1982): 127.

5. See <http://www.lucidchart.com>.

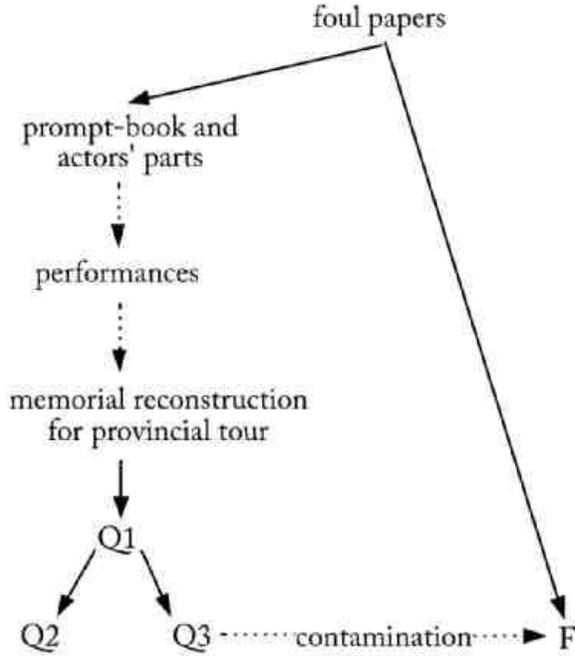


Fig. 2: Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, with John Jowett and William Montgomery, *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 375.

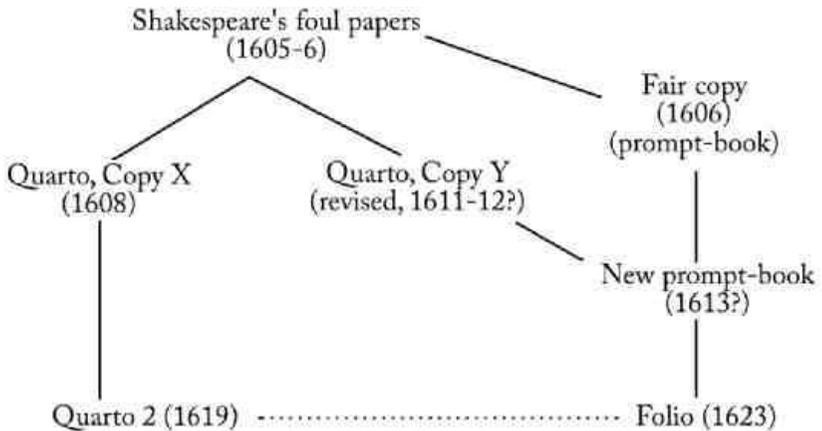


Fig. 3: *The Tragedy of King Lear*, ed. Jay L. Halio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 70.

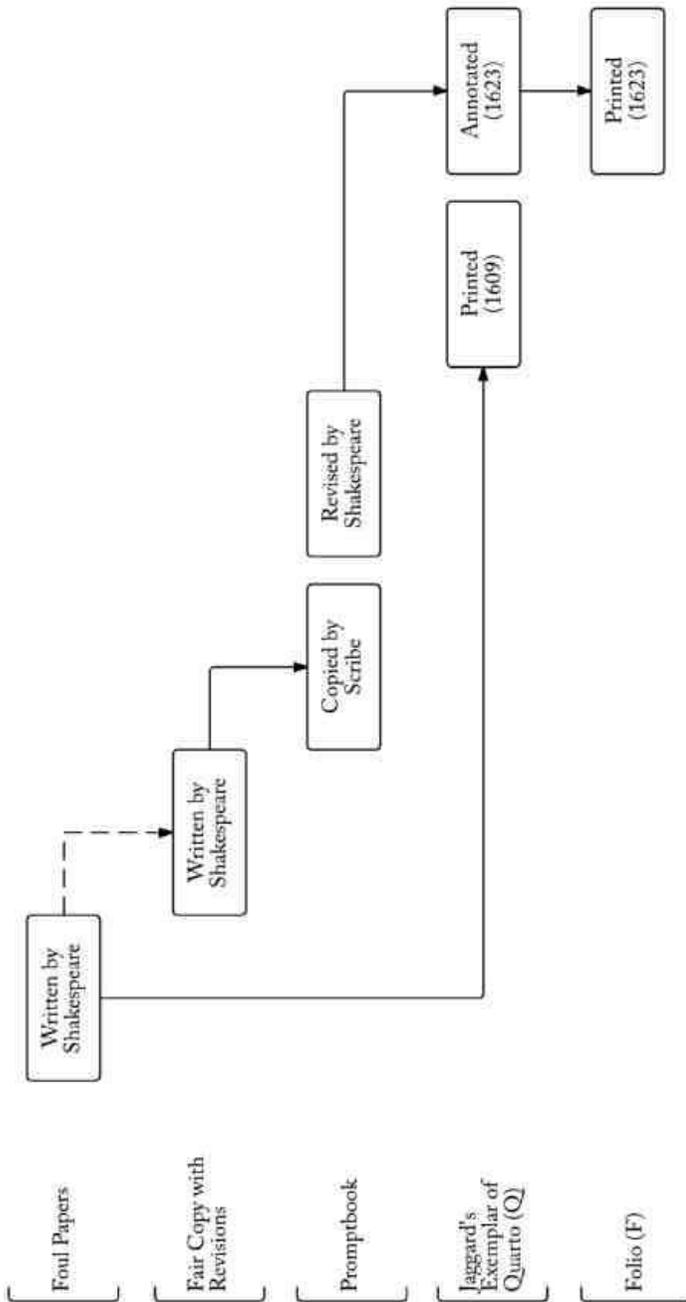


Fig. 4. The same information as in Figure 1, presented in the new form.

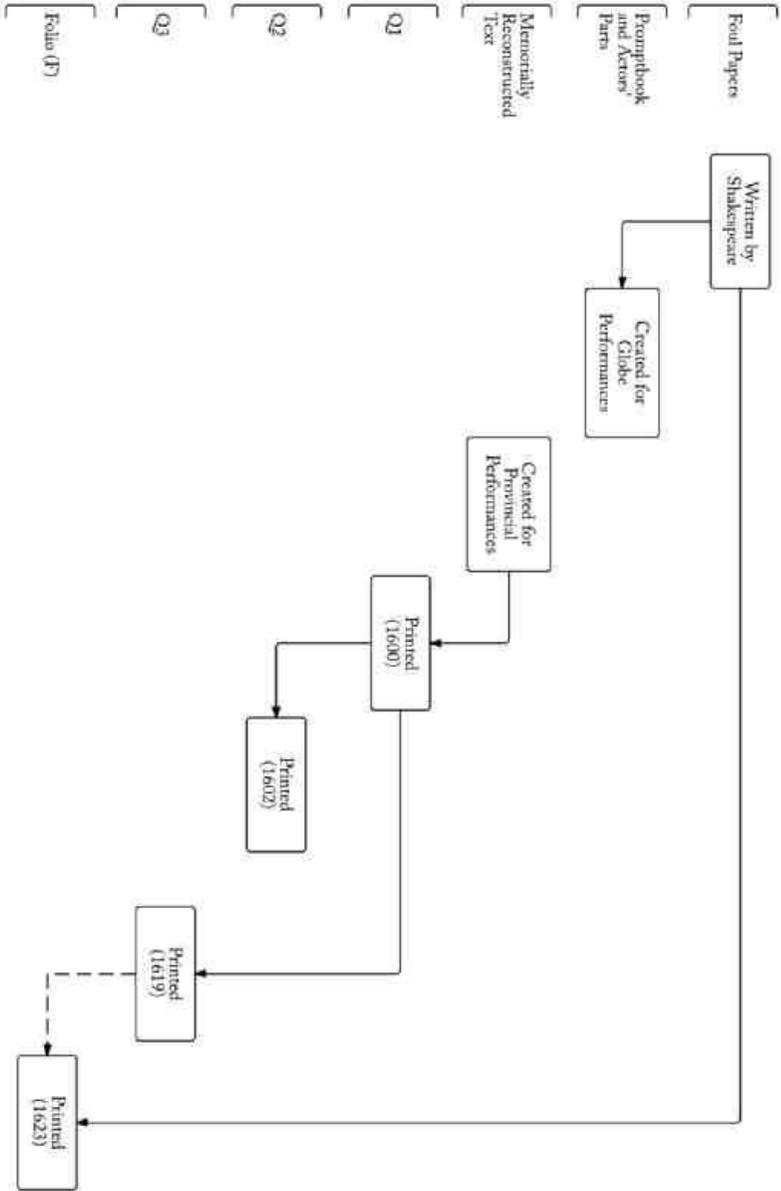


Fig. 5: The same information as in Figure 2, presented in the new form.

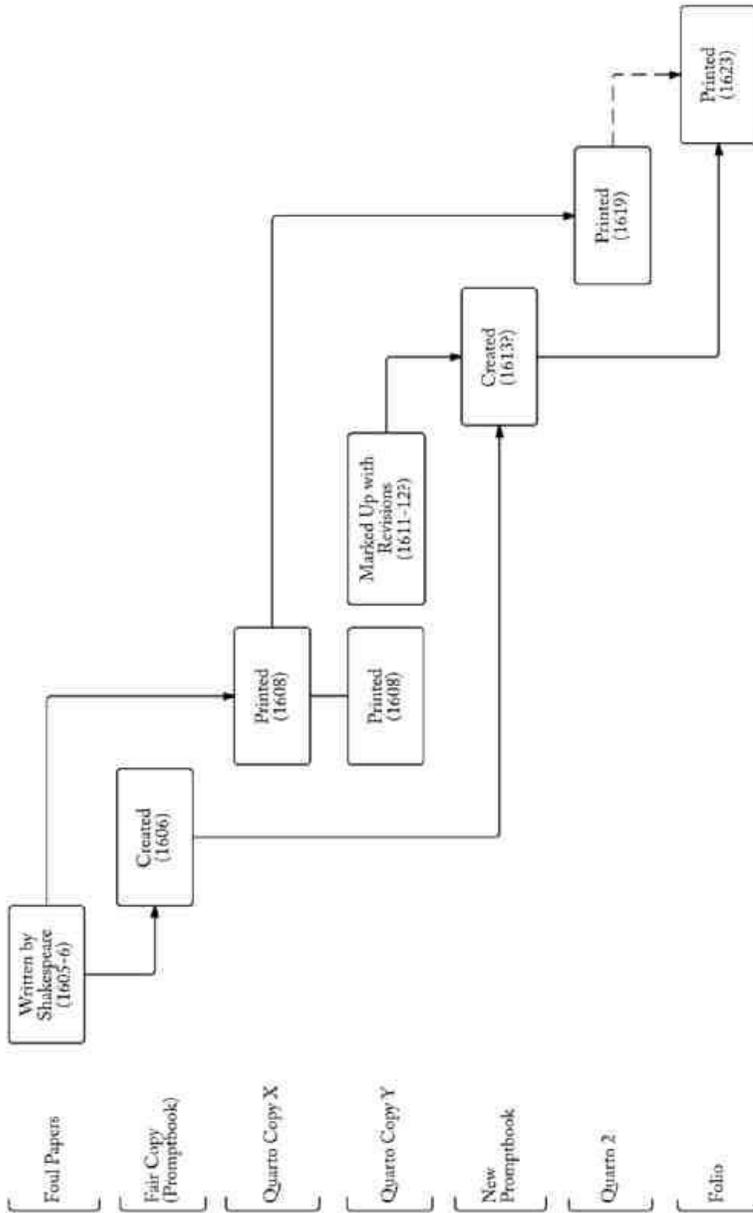


Fig. 6: The same information as in Figure 3, presented in the new form.

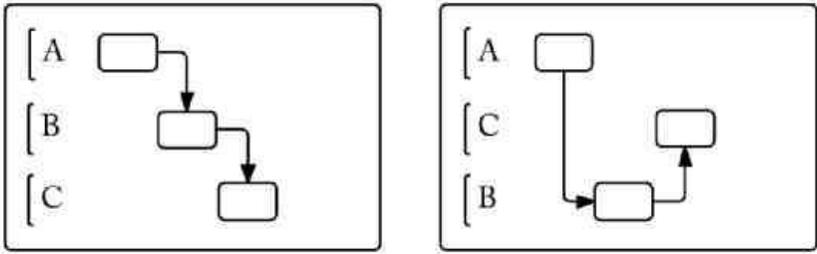


Fig. 7: Swim lanes arranged in different orders convey the same information.