

And quench'd the stelled fires ; 60  
Yet, poor old heart, he holp the heavens to rain.  
If wolves had at thy gate howl'd that dearn time,  
Thou should'st have said " Good porter, turn the key."

60. *stelled*] F, Q corr.; *steeled* Q uncorr., Qq 2, 3. 61. *holp*] F; *holpt* Q.  
*rain*] F; *rage* Q. 62. *howl'd*] F; *heard* Q. *dearn*] Q; *sterne* F.

60. *stelled fires*] Theobald explains 'starry fires,' as if from the Latin, *stella*. But Nares, Schmidt, and Onions take it to mean 'fixed lights.' Cf. *Luc.* 1444:

"To find a face where all distress  
is stell'd"; and *Sonnets*, xxiv:  
"Mine eye hath play'd the  
painter, and hath stell'd  
Thy beauty's form in table of  
my heart."

The word, from M.E. *stellen*, O.E. *stellan*, means *fixed* in all three passages. But there is no reason why Shakespeare should not have had the secondary meaning of *starry* in mind: indeed, it is impossible to believe he did not. "Fixed stars" are stars, as opposed to "wandering stars" (planets).

61. *holp*] helped.

62. *dearn*] dreary, dread, dire. Cf. *Per.* III. Chorus, 15. The F word is comparatively weak, and doubtless a sophistication.

63-5. *Thou . . . children*] This passage has been much discussed. The problems involved are (i) Should the inverted commas be closed after *key*, or after *subscribe*? (ii) Does *Cruels* mean 'cruel acts' or 'cruel creatures'? (iii) Are we to accept F *subscribe*, or Q *subscrib'd*?

It will be convenient to discuss them in the reverse order. As the F reading makes good sense, certainly as good as that of Q, we should accept it. *Subscribe* can be taken as a 3rd plural present indicative, or as an imperative. It can mean 'yield,' 'surrender,' 'submit,' 'assent,' 'make acknowledgement of.' It is more natural to take *cruels* to mean 'cruel creatures,' like the

wolves mentioned in the context. Cf. *Sonnet* cxlix. But Verity and Perrett take it to mean 'cruel acts.' As Duthie points out, Shakespeare uses 'vulgars' (common people. *W.T.* II. I. 94), 'potents' (powerful people. *K.J.* II. I. 358), and 'resolutes' (resolute people, *Ham.* I. I. 98). If we end the quotation after *subscribe*, we may paraphrase: "Good porter, unlock the door and let the wolves in. All other cruel creatures yield to compassion on occasion, on such a night as this; and so will I too." Schmidt compares *T.C.* IV. v. 105-6:

"Hector in his blaze of wrath  
subscribes  
To tender objects."

(i.e. gives up his anger at the sight of objects of compassion). The objection to this arrangement is that Regan would be unlikely to admit her cruelty to the porter, though Duthie claims that it is quite consonant with the mood of the speech that Gloucester should attribute to Regan a cynical avowal of such self-knowledge. If, on the other hand, we take "All cruels else subscribe" to be outside the quotation, we can interpret in two ways: (a) "All other cruel creatures yield to feelings of compassion under strong provocation; you alone do not" (Duthie). (b) "Leave on one side all other cruel creatures." In the light of the *Troilus and Cressida* quotation (a) seems preferable.

Perrett is the most persuasive of those who take *cruels* to mean 'cruel deeds.' He paraphrases: "Never mind about your other cruel deeds, . . . subscribe them, let us leave them

All cruels else subscribe : but I shall see  
The winged vengeance overtake such children. 65  
*Corn.* See 't shalt thou never. Fellows, hold the chair.  
Upon these eyes of thine I'll set my foot.  
*Glou.* He that will think to live till he be old,  
Give me some help! O cruel! O you Gods!  
*Reg.* One side will mock another ; th' other too. 70  
*Corn.* If you see vengeance,—  
*First Serv.* Hold your hand, my Lord.  
I have serv'd you ever since I was a child,  
But better service have I never done you  
Than now to bid you hold.  
*Reg.* How now, you dog!  
*First Serv.* If you did wear a beard upon your chin 75  
I'd shake it on this quarrel.  
*Reg.* What do you mean?  
*Corn.* My villain! [*They draw and fight.*]  
*First Serv.* Nay then, come on, and take the chance of  
anger.  
*Reg.* Give me thy sword. A peasant stand up thus!  
[*Takes a sword and runs at him behind.*]

64. *subscribe*] F; *subscrib'd* Q. 67. *these*] F; *those* Q. 69. *you*] F;  
*ye* Q. 70. *th' other*] F; *tother* Q. 71. *vengeance*—] Q; *vengeance*. F.  
72. *you*] om. Q 1. 76. *Reg.*] See note below. 77. *S.D.*] Q; om. F.  
78. *Nay*] F; *Why* Q. 79. *S.D.*] Q; Killen him. F.

out of consideration—but for that impious act of shutting out your father in such a storm . . . I shall see the winged vengeance overtake you and Goneril, such children." But I think Duthie's interpretation, given above, is the better.

If we read 'subscrib'd,' it may be taken as a 3rd plural past indicative ("All other cruel creatures yielded to feelings of compassion"—Duthie). In any case, the general meaning of the passage is clear. Gloucester is telling Regan that she has been more cruel to her father than she would have been to wolves, and because of this unnaturalness displayed by her and by her sister, he will see the

swift vengeance of heaven overtake them.

65. *winged vengeance*] divine vengeance, like a bird of prey. But he may be thinking of winged spirits, or of lightning. Cf. *iv.* II. 46-7; *ii.* *iv.* 163-4; and *Ps.* cxliv. 6: "Send forth the lyghtnyng, and scatter them, shute out thyne arrowes, and consume them."

76. *What . . . mean*] Ascribed to Regan by Kittredge, after a suggestion by Craig. Furness thought the words should be given to Cornwall.

77. *villain*] perhaps punning on the old meaning, 'serf.'

78. *take . . . anger*] run the risk of fighting while angry.