

SHAKESPEARE'S ANECDOTAL CHARACTER

MARGRETA DE GRAZIA

The Character of the Man is best seen in his Writing.
(Nicholas Rowe)

Why is the Shakespeare of the anecdotes at such variance with the Shakespeare of the biographies? The biographical narrative gives us a Shakespeare of increasing worldly success: more property, more literary acclaim, a coat of arms and a posthumous monument in stone as well as in print. The anecdotal Shakespeare, however, is quite notorious: he violates decorum, breaks laws and even commits sacrilege. Stephen Greenblatt has noted that the biographical Shakespeare left a clean record behind, especially for a man of the theatre: 'The fact that there are no police reports, no privy council orders, indictments, or post-mortem inquests'.¹ This, he maintains, 'tells us something significant about Shakespeare's life – he possessed a gift for staying out of trouble'. But anecdotal Shakespeare repeatedly, almost consistently, *is* in trouble, one might even say *asks* for trouble. Why do these two forms of life-writing deliver such antithetical Shakespeares: the one delinquent and the other respectable?

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The first biography of Shakespeare is generally considered to be *Some Account of the Life &c.* by Nicholas Rowe, prefixed to his 1709 edition, *The Works of Mr. William Shakespeare*.² The edition ushered Shakespeare into the eighteenth century in a brand new format. It divided into six volumes the monolithic folio volume in which the works

had been reproduced four times in the course of the seventeenth century (1623, 1632, 1663–64, 1685). But it also broke from the folio tradition by replacing its elegiac front matter with a forty-page biography. The folio dedication, address and verses responding to Shakespeare's death were discarded and replaced in 1709 with an account of his life, from his birth in Stratford to his grave and monument there. That life performed the same unifying function as had the folio's elegiac preliminaries.³ Prefacing the works of a modern author with a life was something of a novelty. Its value was not self-evident as were those of 'the great Men of Antiquity' – 'their Families, the common Accidents of their Lives, and even their Shape, Make and Features' (i). And indeed the idea of featuring a life was not Rowe's but that of his publisher. It was Jacob Tonson's intent to publish Shakespeare in a bibliographic and typographic format modelled on that accorded to translations of the ancients. As

¹ Stephen Greenblatt, 'The Traces of Shakespeare's Life', in *The New Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. Margreta de Grazia and Stanley Wells (Cambridge, 2010), p. 4.

² *The Works of Mr. William Shakespeare*, 6 vols., ed. Nicholas Rowe (London, 1709) 1, pp. i–xl. Subsequent citations to Rowe's *Some Account* will appear parenthetically hereafter. For Alexander Pope's substantial revision of Rowe's *Some Account*, published in his 1725 edition and reprinted throughout the eighteenth century, see S. Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare's Lives* (Oxford, 1991), p. 91.

³ On Shakespeare's decease as the unifying postulate of the First Folio, see Margreta de Grazia, 'Shakespeare's Timeline', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 65 (2014), 379–98.

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1. Gerard van der Gucht: Frontispiece to *The Works of Mr. William Shakspear*, ed. Nicholas Rowe (London, 1709).

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the works of Homer and Virgil, for example, had appeared in multi-volumed format with a prefatory Life, so too would Shakespeare's.⁴

The classicizing intent of Rowe's edition is apparent in its frontispiece (Illustration 1).

Its subject is clear: Shakespeare is being crowned by Comedy and Tragedy, with winged Fame aloft, triumphantly trumpeting Shakespeare's glory, and dark Ignorance quelled under Comedy's foot. The engraved frame is studiously antiquated, with its voluminously draped figures, laurel wreaths and branches, thespian masks and instruments, raised pedestal, and arched recess of classicized pilasters. But the figure honoured by the classical trappings is altogether modern: in period doublet with loose shirt-ties. Even the medium of his likeness is modern: a painted portrait rather than a stone bust, taken from the early seventeenth-century Chandos portrait. The clashing temporalities of frame and enframed are intended to jar. In a witty inversion, the classical world is paying homage to the modern author, instead of the other way around.

Yet anyone who had read the earlier notices about Shakespeare (in Thomas Fuller, William Winstanley, Edward Phillips or Gerard Langbaine) or the critical commentaries on him (by Ben Jonson, John Dryden or Thomas Rymer) might have been surprised to see him so honoured. From the time of his death and throughout the seventeenth century, Shakespeare was known for his lack of learning, particularly his unfamiliarity with the ancients. Born and bred in Stratford, with no formal education beyond grammar school, how could it be otherwise? The engraving foregrounds a problem that dogged Shakespeare until well into the eighteenth century: how could a poet who had neglected the classics be himself a classic? Indeed what Rowe terms his 'Ignorance of the Ancients' (iii) might link him more to the sad figure underfoot than the one laureated by the classical genres. One might also question whether Shakespeare deserved the double crown from Comedy and Tragedy; as Rowe will point out, the majority of Shakespeare's plays were too generically mixed to qualify as either (xvii). And there is something else anomalous: a painting

does not belong on a stone pedestal. Precariously propped up against Comedy's elongated forearm, the portrait would topple, were she to move.

In fact, the frame was designed not for Shakespeare, but for Pierre Corneille. It was lifted for Rowe's edition from the engraving appearing on the frontispiece of several early collections of his works.⁵ In the original engraving, a bust of Corneille sits securely on the stone plinth (Illustration 2). As Stuart Sillars points out in discussing the two engravings, the honorific statuary is perfectly appropriate to the author who is 'arguably the most complete adherent to Aristotelian principles as reinvented by French academic critics'.⁶ But how could the poet indifferent to the classical authorities be elevated to the status of classic? If there were an English counterpart to Corneille, it would have been the poet who, as we shall see, influentially defined himself against Shakespeare – Ben Jonson. As John Dryden would conclude in comparing the two dramatists, it was Jonson who wrote correct plays and who also laid down in his *Timber or Discoveries*,

⁴ On Jacob Tonson's deployment of features associated with translations of the classics (a prefatory life, octavo size, typefaces and print ornaments, quality of paper, and engraved portraits and illustrations) in Rowe's edition of Shakespeare, see Robert B. Hamm Jr., 'Rowe's Shakespeare (1709) and the Tonson House Style', *College Literature*, 31 (2004), 179–205. Paulina Kewes also discusses Tonson's commissioning of Rowe, 'Shakespeare's Lives in Print, 1662–1821', in Robin Myers, ed., *Lives in Print: Biography and the Book Trade from the Middle Ages to the 21st Century* (New Castle, DE, and London, 2002), 55–82.

⁵ For details on the French original and English adaptation, see T. S. R. Boase, 'Illustrations of Shakespeare's Plays in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 10 (1947), p. 86. Though the signature beneath the engraving reads 'M: V dr. Gucht sculp' (Michael van der Gucht), a Flemish engraver employed by Tonson, Boase attributes the engraving to his son, Gerard van der Gucht.

⁶ Stuart Sillars, *The Illustrated Shakespeare, 1709–1875* (Cambridge, 2008), 35. Sillars misidentifies the source of Shakespeare's portrait in the roundel as 'a replica of the Droeshout portrait'. On Corneille's classicism or *régulier*, see John D. Lyons, 'Regularity: Articulating the Aesthetic', in *Kingdom of Disorder: The Theory of Tragedy in Classical France* (West Lafayette, Ind., 1999), pp. 1–42, esp. pp. 1–9.

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2. Guillaume Vallet, after Antoine Paillet: Frontispiece to *Oeuvres de Pierre Corneille* (Rouen, 1664).

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'as many and profitable Rules for perfecting the Stage, as any wherewith the *French* can furnish us'.⁷

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As Rowe maintains at the very start of his *Some Account*, Shakespeare's education was limited. He was educated in Stratford, 'for some time in a Free-school, where 'tis probable he acquir'd that little *Latin* he was Master of' (ii). Nor was his provincial grammar school education ever completed. According to Rowe, his father, Mr John Shakespear, a wool-dealer with ten children, under straitened circumstances, 'was forc'd to withdraw him from thence, and unhappily prevented his further Proficiency in that Language' (iii). Because he needed his eldest son to help with his own trade, the boy's schooling continued in his father's workshop: 'he could give him no better education than his own employment' (ii).

After the account of Shakespeare's aborted education, Rowe moves on to his forced departure from Stratford: 'an Extravagance that he was guilty of, forc'd him both out of his Country and that way of Living which he had taken up' (v). He poached deer from Sir Thomas Lucy's park, 'more than once', is prosecuted, and then protests so bitterly that Sir Thomas redoubles his prosecution, compelling Shakespeare to flee to London, an outlaw. Rowe has named his offence carefully: it is an 'extravagance', a word that maintained close connection to its Latin roots (*extra*, beyond + *vagari*, to wander) into the eighteenth century; in John Kersey's 1702 *A New English Dictionary*, 'extravagant' is defined as 'wandering beyond the due bounds', and is synonymous with 'disordinate', 'irregular', 'wild', 'savage', 'furious' and 'hair-brain'd'. By 'robbing a park', Shakespeare both trespasses on another man's land and seizes his property.⁸ And he offends 'more than once'. When made accountable, he strikes back with another injury, this time against Lucy's reputation, with a libellous ballad. And his vindictiveness does not stop when he flees Stratford: in London, many years after the trespass, as Rowe relates, it is still

rankling when he satirizes his old prosecutor in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (xviii).

As his career began in Stratford with offence and injury, so too does it end there, 'some Years before his Death' (xxv), and in another instance of going too far. In retirement, by virtue of his 'pleasurable Wit, and good Nature', he spends time 'in pleasant conversation' with various of his neighbours; 'Amongst them . . . he had a particular Intimacy with Mr. *Combe*, an old Gentleman noted thereabouts for his Wealth and Usury' (xxxvii). On the assumption that Shakespeare would outlive him, Mr. Combe 'in a laughing manner' asks the poet to write his epitaph. Shakespeare 'immediately' obliges, but hardly in the jocular spirit of the request. His epitaph first reduces Combe's chances of salvation to ten per cent, the interest rate he has been charging, '*Ten in the Hundred lies here ingrav'd / 'Tis a Hundred to Ten, his Soul is not sav'd*', before envisioning his outright damnation: '*If any Man ask, Who lies in this Tomb? / Oh! ho! quoth the Devil, 'tis my John-a-Combe*'. Thus a genial request produces a hostile response, '[T]he Sharpness of the Satyr is said to have stung the Man so severely, that he never forgave it.' Rowe says no more, but this is the anecdote that later Shakespearians are most keen to repudiate, as repelled by Shakespeare's maleficence here as they are by Hamlet's desire to kill Claudius at his prayers.⁹ Both forms of malice, by targeting the afterlife of the soul, overstep divine prerogative.

Thus upon both leaving Stratford and returning to it, in his first piece of writing as well as his last, Shakespeare acts in violation of laws and norms. He ends up exiled from his native town at the

⁷ *An Essay of Dramatick Poesie*, ed. Samuel Holt Monk (Berkeley, 1971), vol. 17, p. 58, in *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. Edward Niles Hooker, H. T. Swedenberg Jr. and Vinton A. Dearing, 20 vols. (Berkeley, 1956–2000).

⁸ See entry for 'extravagant', *Lexicons of Early Modern English*, leme.library.utoronto.ca/

⁹ On the unsettling possibility that this epitaph, rather than *The Tempest*, might be Shakespeare's last non-collaborative work, see Alfred Corn, 'Shakespeare's Epitaph', *Hudson Review*, 64:2 (2011), 295–303, p. 295.

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start of his career and alienating his companions at its close. Two pieces of injurious writing frame his career: a libellous ballad and a scathing epitaph, both in excess of their respective occasions, the one felonious, the other bad-mannered. It could be said that extravagance characterizes his behaviour from start to finish.

And not only his behaviour. When Rowe remarks on the 'beautiful Extravagance, which we admire in *Shakespear*' (iii), it is not law or manners that Shakespeare has exceeded, but the rules of art. Shakespeare's abbreviated grammar school education accounts for an undisputed fact: 'It is without Controversie, that he had no knowledge of the Writings of the Antient Poets' (iii). This can be inferred 'from his Works themselves, where we find no traces of anything that looks like an Imitation of [the Ancients] . . . so that his not copying at least something from them, may be an Argument of his never having read 'em'. The plays do reveal some learning: 'Some *Latin* without question he did know, and one may see up and down in his Plays how far his Reading that way went.' Rowe supposes it went about as far as that of Chiron, 'one of the *Gothick* princes' in *Titus Andronicus* who recognizes 'a *Verse in Horace*' from his school-boy Latin, 'Which, I suppose, was the Author's Case' (iv). Rowe is puzzled by how Shakespeare could have based *The Comedy of Errors* on Plautus's *Menaechmi*, doubting he was 'Master of *Latin* enough to read it in the Original' (xv) and knowing of no contemporary translation. Yet while Shakespeare's unfamiliarity with the Ancients is blamed for his incorrect and irregular writing, it might also be credited with his explosive vitality: 'For tho' the knowledge of [the Ancients] might have made him more Correct, yet it is not improbable but that the Regularity and Deference for them . . . might have restrain'd some of that Fire, Impetuosity, and even beautiful Extravagance, which we admire in *Shakespear*' (iii).

The irregularity of Shakespeare's plots is so well known that Rowe hardly comments on it, except to complain that the plot in *The Merchant of Venice* turns on 'that extravagant and unusual kind of Bond' (xxi) in which a loan of 3000 ducats can

be quit with a pound of flesh. *The Tempest* is the exception, singled out for its respect of the unities: 'the Unities are kept here with an Exactness uncommon to the Liberties of his Writing' (xxiii). In general, however, the 'Liberties of his Writing' prevail, without attention to generic decorum or the dramatic unities.

While irregularity mars plots (held primary by the Ancients), it makes for Shakespeare's most applauded characters. There is the 'extravagant Character of Caliban . . . a wonderful Invention in the Author, who could strike out such a particular wild image . . . one of the finest and most uncommon Grotesques that was ever seen' (xxiv). The melancholy of Jaques in *As You Like It* is 'as singular and odd as it is diverting' (xx). Petruchio is an 'uncommon piece of Humour' (xviii). Grinning and cross-gartered, 'the fantastical Steward *Malvolio*' is another favorite: 'there is something singularly Ridiculous and Pleasant' in him (xix). Also singled out for admiration is the 'irregular Greatness of mind in *M. Antony*', the Roman general who 'o'erflows the measure' (xxx).

By consensus, Shakespeare's greatest character is the fat knight who admits to living 'out of all order, out of all compass': '*Falstaff* is allow'd by every body to be a Master-piece' (xvii). His extravagances are multiple: 'theft, lying, cowardice, vain-glory: and in short, every kind of viciousness' (xviii). If there is any fault in his characterization, it is that Shakespeare 'has given him so much Wit as to make him almost too agreeable'; audiences, therefore, regret his banishment in *2 Henry IV*. Wit is the faculty Shakespeare also possesses in abundance; Rowe notes 'the advantages of his Wit' (viii), 'the Reputation of his Wit' (ix), 'the power of his Wit' (x). He and Falstaff have something else in common: 'Amongst other Extravagances, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, [Shakespeare] has made [Falstaff] a Dear-stealer', and made Falstaff's prosecutor a Warwickshire justice who possesses a coat of arms 'very near' that of Shakespeare's prosecutor, Sir Thomas Lucy. It is not Hamlet or Prospero who bears a special affinity to Shakespeare, but Falstaff. So, too, do his other singular characters: their excesses reflect

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his unruly anecdotal character as well as the irregularity of his style.

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For the middle period of Shakespeare's life, Rowe has no records, other than the plays themselves. The reference to the vestal virgin in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is 'plainly' a compliment to Queen Elizabeth (viii), who admired and encouraged Shakespeare: 'Queen Elizabeth had several of his Plays Acted before her, and without doubt gave him many gracious Marks of her Favour.' Yet she is not so pleased when in his history plays he provocatively named his fat rogue after the Protestant martyr Sir John Oldcastle. She commanded Shakespeare to change the name, and he does alter it, but not without offending the descendants of another Sir John, a Knight of the Garter and war hero: 'The [first] Offence was indeed avoided; but I don't know whether the Author may not have been somewhat to blame in his second Choice' (ix). (Anecdotal Shakespeare specializes in writing that offends the living and the dead: a libellous ballad, a scathing epitaph and a defamatory impersonation.) The Queen seems less concerned to protect noble reputations in her next command: she 'commanded [Shakespeare] to continue [him] for one Play more, and to shew him in Love' (viii–ix). The possibility of Falstaff's making a comeback may have come at the suggestion of the Epilogue at the end of 2 *Henry IV* who allows for a sequel in which 'Falstaff shall die of a sweat', though not in the fashion of his original namesake, who was hanged and burned: 'For Oldcastle died a martyr, and this is not the man'. While the Epilogue's promise is never realized in *Henry V*, the Queen's command resulted in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and '[h]ow well she was obey'd, the Play it self is an admirable Proof'. The play, it must be said, admirably proves no such thing. Hiding in a dirty laundry basket and pilloried in the guise of 'the fat woman of Brentford', 'the greasy knight' comes closer to the Epilogue's dying of a sweat than Elizabeth's being 'in Love'. Rowe praises the '*Billet-doux*' Falstaff sends to Mistress Ford and Mistress Page, but with qualification: they are 'very good Expressions of Love

in their Way' (xix). 'In their Way' seems to imply the unusual status of Falstaff's love letters, mass-produced with mercenary intent. Shakespeare, it would seem, either neglected the royal command or indeed flouted it.

The same paragraph that describes Queen Elizabeth's patronage of Shakespeare tells of the Earl of Southampton's. Evidence for this relationship, too, is located in Shakespeare's works, in this instance, the dedication of *Venus and Adonis* to Southampton.¹⁰ Rowe uses the same epithet to describe Southampton's patronage, as he had Elizabeth's – 'Marks of Favour' – but with suggestive additions: Shakespeare 'had the Honour to meet with many great and uncommon Marks of Favour and Friendship from the Earl of *Southampton*, famous in the Histories of that Time for his Friendship to the unfortunate Earl of *Essex*'. Shakespeare received not only 'Favour' but 'Friendship' from Southampton, who in turn was renowned for his 'Friendship' with the Earl of Essex, who was 'unfortunate' in having led a rebellion against the Queen in which Southampton colluded: both were tried for treason, the former executed, the latter incarcerated. Shakespeare, Rowe had earlier noted, had also been acquainted with Essex, as could be inferred from *Henry V*, which in its final act features 'a Compliment very handsomly turn'd to the Earl of Essex' (vii). Especially after notice of Shakespeare's lax obedience to the Queen's commands, his association with her two adversaries might hint at errant political leanings, another form of extravagance.

Startling to Rowe is the exceptional magnitude of Southampton's patronage, '[a] Bounty very great, and very rare at any time': £1000 (x). To enable his eighteenth-century readers to appreciate the sum's enormity, Rowe gives its current equivalent. £1000 in Shakespeare's day was 'almost equal to that profuse Generosity the present Age has shewn to French Dancers and Italian

¹⁰ Rowe does not mention the dedication to Southampton in *Lucrece*, though he does name *Tarquin* and *Lucrece* among the works by Shakespeare not included in his edition, *Some Account*, p. xxxix.

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Eunuchs' (x). Rowe's figures are quite accurate. In 1700, Thomas Betterton, the actor and manager of the Duke's Company whom Rowe credits with the gathering of materials for his *Some Account* (xxxiv), bemoaned the crushing expense of procuring French dancers.¹¹ In 1710, Senesino, a celebrated castrato from Sienna (for whom Handel wrote arias) was offered the vast sum of £2000 a year to perform in London.¹² This adds a peculiar cast to Southampton's generosity: the sum he has given Shakespeare in exchange for his services to literature approximates what theatre impresarios of Rowe's day were willing to pay out to French dancers, known for their sexual availability and technique, and to Italian castrati, whose sexual ambiguity piqued prurient curiosity.¹³ What was there about Shakespeare that drew such outlandish munificence from Southampton? His *Venus and Adonis*? His politics?

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In relating Shakespeare's London encounters, Rowe moves down the social ladder, from queen to earl to 'private' friends: first the courtly Edmund Spenser and then the urban Ben Jonson. While the episodes involving Elizabeth and Southampton derive from Shakespeare's works – the Falstaff plays and the dedication to *Venus and Adonis* respectively – the accounts of these two friendships issue from Spenser's and Jonson's. Rowe quotes three elegiac stanzas from *Tears of the Muses* (1591), 'lamenting [Willy's] Absence with the tenderness of a Friend' (xi). He is confident that Spenser's 'pleasant Willy' is Shakespeare, 'dead of late'. It needn't matter that Shakespeare outlived Spenser by over a decade, for the verses are not intended literally: 'Mr. Spenser does not mean that he was then really Dead'. His absence was the result of his having withdrawn from the stage, 'out of a disgust he had taken at the then ill taste of the Town, and the mean Condition of the Stage' (xii). The identification allows for another variation on Shakespeare's unlicensed behaviour: the crude and coarse state of culture in his time.

Shakespeare's friendship with Ben Jonson also has a textual source, Jonson's heavily Latinate

commonplace book, *Timber or Discoveries* (1641).¹⁴ *Some Account* tapers off by reproducing in full Jonson's entry on Shakespeare. It begins obliquely, as if targeting not Shakespeare, but his fellow players, Heminge and Condell, who in the preliminaries to the First Folio had praised the state of Shakespeare's manuscript papers:

I remember the Players have often mention'd it as an Honour to Shakespear, that in Writing (whatsoever he penn'd) he never blotted out a Line. My Answer hath been, Would he had blotted a thousand, which they thought a malevolent Speech. I had not told Posterity this, but for their Ignorance, who chose that Circumstance to commend their Friend by, wherein he most faulted. (xxxviii)

For Heminge and Condell, clean manuscript pages attest to a direct relation between what Shakespeare wrote and what the Folio printed. Transmission is unmediated, with no contaminating interference from players or printers, allowing for a direct transmission from Shakespeare's mind to his hand to his papers to the Folio printers: 'His mind and hand went together: And what he thought, he uttered with that easinesse, that wee have scarce received from him a blot in his papers.'¹⁵ (The same claim appears on the Folio's title page: 'Published according to the True and Originall Copies'.) But Jonson misconstrues the claim, perhaps intentionally, taking it as not an advertisement of the Folio's proximity to the author, but rather of the author's breezy writing practice. The claim irks Jonson, not

¹¹ See David Roberts, *Thomas Betterton: The Greatest Actor of the Restoration Stage* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 168.

¹² On the 'prix exorbitant' commanded by Senesino, see Jonathan Keates, *Handel: The Man & His Music* (1985, rev. ed. London, 2008), p. 167.

¹³ On the sexually charged body of the castrato, see Roger Freitas, 'The Eroticism of Emasculation: Confronting the Baroque Body of the Castrato', *The Journal of Musicology*, 20 (2003), 196–249.

¹⁴ *Discoveries*, ed. Lorna Hudson, in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, gen. ed. Ian Donaldson et al., 7 vols. (Cambridge, 2012), vol. 7, pp. 521–2.

¹⁵ A Folger copy of the First Folio on Early English Books Online; *Mr. William Shakespeares comedies, histories, & tragedies* (London, 1623), STC22273, sig. A2-A3.

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because he doubts it, but because it applauds what should be censured: in their 'Ignorance', the players 'chose that Circumstance to commend their Friend by, wherein he most faulted'. Lest posterity be deceived, he counters their boast with a blast: 'Would he had blotted a thousand'.

To a printer, papers covered with blots would be a nightmare. To a classically minded stylist, however, they would signal skilled writing. For both Horace and Quintilian, multiple cancellations are the sign of careful and sustained revision.¹⁶ Jonson translates Horace's *Art of Poetry* where he cites Quintilian on the necessity of reworking verses, by blotting or reforging: 'If to Quintillius you recited aught . . . He'd bid blot all, and to the anvil bring / Those ill-turned verses, to new hammering'.¹⁷ Petrarch's manuscripts are exemplary in this respect. His working papers and successive drafts display his many erasures, insertions, transpositions and inversions, all signs of his craftsmanship, skill and rhetorical technique.¹⁸ Blots indicate that verses have been worked and reworked. As in Latin, *opera* presupposes *operare*, so in its Old English cognate, a work implies work. Though Jonson deemed his own plays 'works' when he included them in his 1616 folio, *The Workes of Benjamin Jonson*, it is doubtful that he would have considered Shakespeare's plays 'works'. Shakespeare simply did not work hard enough. He dashed off his poems and plays with no regard to rules and models.

Lest readers think his critique 'Malevolent' (as the players had), Jonson declares parenthetically his affection and esteem for Shakespeare, 'And to justifie mine own Candor, (for I lov'd the Man, and do honour his Memory . . .)'. Then follows a sentence of unusual grammatical and semantic complexity:

He was, indeed, Honest, and of an open and free Nature, had an Excellent Fancy, brave Notions, and gentle Expressions, wherein he flow'd with that Facility, that sometimes it was necessary he should be stopp'd: *Sufflammandus erat*, as Augustus said of Haterius. His Wit was in his own Power, would the Rule of it had been so too.
(xxxviii)

The main clause commends Shakespeare's nature (as 'Honest', 'open' and 'free'); the first subordinate clause extends the praise to his writing ('flow'd with that Facility'); but the second subordinate clause brings the praise up short ('he should be stopp'd'). What begins in commendation ends in condemnation, and definitively, when backed by two quotations from Seneca, the first quoted in Latin, the second in Jonson's translation. In discussing proper style, Seneca gives the negative example of Haterius who spoke so rapidly and impulsively that Emperor Augustus commented that he be braked.¹⁹ So rapid were his outpourings, according to Seneca, 'that he would muddle them, burst into tears, speak ex tempore and become so profuse in his language that he had to be stopped'. What began as praise of Shakespeare's expansive character turns into blame of his free-flowing style – writing that spills out in such facile fluency, that it must be stopped, as Jonson stops the course of his own sentence with ten punctuation marks, including a 'double prick' or colon after 'stopp'd.' before quoting Seneca, the arbiter of style, who is quoting Augustus, the emperor of Rome. As Augustus checked the orator Haterius, so Jonson would bridle Shakespeare. Liberality, in government as in writing, risks licentiousness, unless controlled by laws or rules, what Rowe terms, 'the Regularity of those written Precepts' of the Ancients (xxvi).

Rowe relates how the friendship between Shakespeare and Jonson began. The aspiring Jonson was about to have his work rudely rejected

¹⁶ On the prime importance of revision in Quintilian, see *The Orator's Education*, ed. and trans. Donald A. Russell, 5 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 2001), vol 4, 10.4; for Horace, see *Satires* I.x. and *Ars Poetica*, lines 72–3.

¹⁷ *Horace his Art of Poetry, Made English by Ben Jonson*, ed. Colin Burrow, in *The Cambridge Jonson*, vol. 7, lines 626–9. Burrow notes that these lines were underlined in Jonson's copy of the Latin, see n. p. 62.

¹⁸ I am grateful to William Kennedy for drawing my attention to the significance of Petrarch's heavily revised working papers as a manifestation of his poetic craft or art.

¹⁹ See Lewis A. Sussman, *The Elder Seneca* (Leyden, 1978), 108–9, 170–1.

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by the players when Shakespeare interceded to recommend him: 'After this they were profess'd Friends, tho' I don't know whether the other ever made him an equal return of Gentleness and Sincerity' (xiii). But clearly the 'return' was not 'equal'. While Shakespeare promoted Jonson's career at its start, Jonson detracted from Shakespeare's after his death. Yet Jonson's antipathy was not personal but stylistic: indeed there is no separating the two. What Jonson couldn't abide about Shakespeare's style was its unruliness or irregularity. As Rowe astutely noted, even Jonson's praise for him was tinged with opprobrium: 'And if at times he has affected to commend him, it has always been with some Reserve' (xiii). Jonson was the correct poet, the one who respected the classical genres, translated Horace's *Arts Poetica*, and devised an English Grammar to regularize the vernacular; so dedicated was he to correctness that he proofed his own 1616 folio. Unlike extravagant Shakespeare, he knew when to stop.

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Rowe is careful to distance himself from Jonson's outright critique. After commenting on Shakespeare's vigour, fire and imagination, he pulls back: 'I would not be thought by this to mean, that [Shakespeare's] Fancy was so loose and extravagant, as to be Independent of the Rule and Government of Judgment' (vii). After all, the success of his edition depended on securing Shakespeare's pre-eminence. Yet the examples he gives of Shakespeare's poetic heights might well have satisfied Jonson's literary standards. While he singled out Shakespeare's extravagant characters for admiration, as we have seen, when it comes to poetry, the passages he applauds and reproduces in full do not demonstrate the 'beautiful extravagance' in which Shakespeare 'gives his Imagination an entire Loose, and raises his Fancy to a flight above Mankind and the Limits of the visible world' (xxiii). They are instead enframed and balanced set-pieces, models of stylistic rule and measure, fully under control, in decorous iambs with mid-line caesuras. Jaques' Seven Ages of Man speech from *As You Like It* is quoted in its entirety (xxi–xxii). Beginning with

a universalization ('All the World's a Stage') and then breaking systematically into seven distinctive parts, the speech is admired because it accomplishes what Horace maintained was so difficult: to speak of the universal specifically, '*Difficile est proprie communia dicere*' (xx). Rowe also holds Shakespeare up to classical precedent when he praises 'The Image of Patience', in Viola's self-referential speech, as a 'Sketch of Statuary'; 'the greatest Masters of *Greece* and *Rome*' would have been hard pressed to equal it (xvii):

She never told her love,
But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud,
Feed on her damask cheek: she pined in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy
She sat like patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief.

As with Jaques' speech, syntactic parallels dominate: 'She never told her love . . . she pined in Thought . . . She sat like patience'. The compressed lines are nicely fitted to the emotion they suppress.

From the tragedies, Rowe selects a passage from *Hamlet* and, once again, measures it against ancient models, this time finding a close analogue. *Hamlet* and *Electra* are 'founded on much the same Tale' (xxxii). Each of the two princes must take revenge on his father's murderer who in each case has married his mother. Yet Rowe is offended by the 'Manners' Sophocles has given to *Electra's* two children.

Orestes embrues his Hands in the Blood of his own Mother; and that barbarous Action is perform'd, tho' not immediately upon the Stage, yet so near, that the Audience hear *Clytemnestra* crying out to *Aeghystus* for Help, and to her Son for Mercy: While *Electra*, her Daughter, and a Princess . . . stands upon the Stage and encourages her Brother in the Parricide. (xxxii)

In a fine reversal of the contest between the Ancients and the moderns, it is the Ancient Sophocles who violates dramatic decorum, with both character (the high born *Electra* and *Orestes* 'ought to have appear'd with more Decency') and action (the shocking matricide carried out within hearing range of the audience). By contrast, modern Shakespeare restrains the action of his prince. Though his motives for abhorring his