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 Matthew Albert Bayfield
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CHAPTER I

THE PREDOMINANT CHARACTERISTIC OF SHAKESPEARE'S VERSE

OUR original authorities for the text of Shakespeare's works are certain Quarto editions published at various dates during his life-time and the First Folio. The last, which was published in 1623, seven years after his death, contains the whole of the plays except *Pericles*, but not the poems. For the following twenty plays the Folio is our sole authority: *The Tempest*, *The Two Gentlemen*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *As You Like It*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Winter's Tale*, *King John*, all three parts of *Henry VI*, *Henry VIII*, *Coriolanus*, *Timon*, *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Cymbeline*¹. If no Quarto has been lost, these were set up from play-house copies, but save perhaps one or two, probably none from Shakespeare's ms. A few of the Quarto texts, however, were probably printed from his original copy. Some of the Quartos ran through several editions, each being as a rule set up from its immediate predecessor and exhibiting an increase in the number of

¹ These will be referred to hereafter as "Folio plays," and those also published in Quarto as "Quarto plays."

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blunders. The Folio text of Quarto plays was in most cases printed from an existing Quarto, usually the latest and most incorrect edition. In some instances the Quarto appears to have been compared with a play-house copy, but it is generally agreed that the whole of the Folio text (both in Quarto and Folio plays) shows unmistakable signs of having been independently "edited" by the reviser or revisers who prepared it for the press.

With the very doubtful exception of three pages of a play to which it is thought he may have contributed (Anthony Munday's *Sir Thomas More*), and a few authentic signatures, none of Shakespeare's handwriting has survived. It is also improbable that he had any opportunity of correcting any single proof of the plays published in Quarto. The ordinary practice of the time was for plays to be sold to the Company with which the playwright was connected, and thereafter he lost all control over them except such as the Company might permit, as for revision. The Folio and, with some exceptions, the Quartos are alike full of serious errors of various kinds. In the Quarto plays they continually present different readings, sometimes the Quarto being right and sometimes the Folio, and in many places what they agree in giving is undoubtedly wrong. The different Quarto texts and those of individual plays of the Folio are of various merit, those of the Quartos¹ being usually the better, but sometimes the reverse. Accordingly, one conclusion to be drawn from this comparison is that the Folio is by no means to be trusted implicitly in the plays for which it is the sole

¹ That is, the First Quarto of each play when there are two or more.

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authority. It also follows that in many passages modern texts can represent no more than the judgement of each editor, or the agreement of several, on disputable points ; what the poet actually wrote here or there must always remain a matter of opinion and be open to argument.

These facts are here given at the outset of our inquiry because they are of the utmost importance in any endeavour to form an estimate of the trustworthiness of the early texts, and consequently have a direct bearing on the question of the versification. For by the habitual use of certain abbreviations, the substitution of different words and the misdivision of lines in a printed edition it is possible to make a poet's verse assume a character very different from that which it had when it left his hands. It will be my endeavour to show that Shakespeare's dramatic verse has suffered much in this way, and that, notwithstanding the enormous amount of learning and labour that has been spent upon his plays, their versification, both as a whole and in several important particulars, has been strangely misunderstood and misrepresented from his own day down to the present time. Features, the recognition of which is essential to a proper appreciation of his handling of the blank verse line and other measures, have either been completely overlooked or regarded as blemishes, or have been thought to indicate corruptions of the text calling for correction.

It will be convenient to begin our inquiry by considering his use of the 'resolved' foot, that is, a metrical foot containing more than two syllables. An illustration will make the meaning of this technical term quite clear.

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If we compare the following two readings of the same line,

- (a) These : eyes could | *not en*|dure y^t | beauties | wrack.
 (b) These : eies could | *never in*|dure sweet | beauties | wrack.

we see that in (b) the syllable *not* of (a) has been replaced by the two syllables of *never*; that is to say, there has been a breaking-up or 'resolution' of the stressed syllable, and the foot *never en-* is called a 'resolved' foot. (a) is the Folio's version of *Richard III*, 1. 2. 127, and (b) that of the Quarto. The latter is the true reading, as we shall see later, but several editors, as Furnivall, Craig, and A. H. Thompson, in the *Leopold*, *Oxford*, and *Arden* editions respectively, follow the Folio.

Anyone who looks through the notes in the *Cambridge Shakespeare* soon discovers that the numerous editors of the plays from Rowe onwards, notwithstanding their many divergences, are in unmistakable though tacit agreement upon one point: they plainly believe that Shakespeare's judgement as to the number of resolved feet to be introduced into blank verse was that they should be few, and the fewer the better. This view is disclosed by the readings adopted by editors in general where the Quartos and Folio offer a purely metrical choice (as in the example just given), by difficulties that have been felt where the text is really sound, and by the emendations proposed where it is corrupt or supposed to be so. Among these latter, which are countless, it is a rare thing to find one that exhibits a trisyllabic foot. Some editors, as Pope,

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Hanmer, and Sidney Walker, even went so far as to alter the text systematically for the purpose of eliminating resolutions, and others more recent, who may for convenience and without discourtesy be called the disyllabists *par excellence*, pursue the same end in another way and even more thoroughly. Abbott, in his *Shakespearian Grammar*, first published about fifty years ago, went to great lengths in this direction, saying that innumerable syllables must be elided or slurred in delivery, but he is left far behind by this school, which includes, I believe, several leading Shakespearian scholars of the present day. They maintain that the actual pronunciation which the poet intended to be given to his verse was that shown in the following list, taken from *Der Vers in Shaksperes Dramen*, a book by one Goswin Koenig, who is the accepted authority of the disyllabists at the present time :

cú-riós't|yof ná'tions—vill'ny—th'nose—th'throat—del'cate—
 qual'ty — hon'ying — pill'ry — mag'cal — trag'cal — pen'ry —
 Hel'na — partic'lar — ridic'lous — des'late — perspic'ous — It'ly —
 Trip'li — wom'nish — Jess'ca — pit'ful — sorr'wful — Im'gen —
 prod'gal — conf'dent — app'tite — Jup'ter — vi'lent — ignom'ny or
 ignomy — duch'ss — do'ng — the'tre (theatre) — dite (diet) — quietly
 (quietly) — de'ty — Prime (Priam) — Plantaj'net — th'breach —
 whi'r (whither) — nour'sher (nourisher) — how came w'ashore ?

These examples are but a few selected from Koenig's exhaustive compilation. It will be noticed that some of the combinations are not to be achieved without a splutter, and that sometimes the aspirate must be dropped, as in

Fier|y ? th'ff'|ry dúke, ? | T'éll th'hot (*thor*) | dúke that—

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The pronunciation of proper names, it is declared, varied in successive lines, as in

'Tis death for any one in Mantua
To come to Pad'a (*Pajja*?).
Then stir Demetr'us up with bitter wrong,
And sometime rail thou like Demetrius.
If Alcibi'des kill my countrymen,
Let Alcibiades know this of Timon.

Being no humorist or even a punster, Shakespeare could make that "most del'cate fiend" the Queen in *Cymbeline* say (for *evil-eyed*) *eel-eyed unto you*, and make another say of her that she repented

The *eels* she hatch'd were not effected. 5. 5. 60.

It need hardly be said that practically every word in Koenig's enormous list of those requiring this painful treatment occurs also in positions where the full pronunciation is necessary even with the ten-syllable scansion. We are to believe, therefore, that two kinds of English were habitually spoken by the same characters and in the same scene on Shakespeare's stage, the one a poet's carefully syllabised English, and the other that which we associate rather with the "Waterloo House young man." As the *Saturday Review* once said of an author's style, "if anyone likes this sort of thing, this is the sort of thing he would like"; but until better reasons than any yet given have been offered on its behalf, one must hesitate to believe that either Shakespeare or his audiences would have approved of it.

Signs of a bias against resolutions are found in the Quartos, but with great irregularity and more often in

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some plays than in others. Their voice, therefore, is uncertain. The Folio, however, is appealed to as decidedly favouring the view that Shakespeare was at pains to avoid resolutions. That it does so to a remarkable degree may readily be admitted by one who has arrived at the very opposite conclusion as to the poet's practice ; but he will make the concession in the spirit of the Clown's words to Cleopatra,

Yes, forsooth, I wish you joy of the worm,

for, as we shall see later, the Folio is in this connexion a fatal friend.

The prevailing view, then, is that Shakespeare's dramatic verse, as he wrote it, exhibited as few resolved rhythms as possible ; but was this his view ? Was it at any period of his production a principle with him to keep down the number to a negligible minimum ? Comparison of the Quartos and the Folio and a careful examination and analysis of the metrical features of the whole of the plays have convinced me that it was not ; that, on the contrary, the rhythms produced by the trisyllabic and quadrisyllabic foot delighted his musical ear, and that he wrote with perhaps special satisfaction at various dates in his career such lines as the following, all of which contain three resolutions, and those starred as many as four :

Tell, me, I be|seech you, | which is the | readiest | way ?

T. S. I. 2. 220.

Now are our | brows ^ | bound with vic|torious | wreaths.

Rich. III I. 1. 5.

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Welcome, my | son : ^ | who are the | violets | now
 That strew the green lap of the new-come spring?
Rich. II 5. 2. 46.

I ; see no | more in you | than in the | ordinari|y
 Of nature's sale-work. *A. Y. L. 3. 5. 42.*

**He is ; fallen in | love with your | foulness, and | she will | fall*
In ; love with my | anger¹. A. Y. L. 3. 5. 66.

That in the | captain is | but a | choleric | word,
 Which ; in the | soldier is | flat | blasphem|y.
M. M. 2. 2. 130.

Was he not | born of | woman ? The | spirits that | know
 All ; mortal | consequences | have pron|ounced me | thus.
Mac. 5. 3. 4.

**Hold thee from | this, for | ever. The | barbarous | Scythian*
Lear 1. 1. 118.

**The ; varying | shore of the | world. O | Antony, | Antony, ||*
Antony ! | Help, ^ | Charmian ! | Help, Iras, | help !²
A. and C. 4. 15. 11 f.

Cannot a|mend me : so|ciety | is no | comfort. Cymb. 4. 2. 12.
Stepp'd before | targes of | proof, ^ | cannot be | found.
ib. 5. 5. 5.

**Dearly, my | delicate | Ariel. | Do not ap|proach.*
Temp. 4. 1. 49.

From the outset he appears to have employed resolved rhythms more freely than any of his contemporaries, among whom Greene perhaps comes nearest to him, and he gradually increased the number until at last they reached an amount to which Swinburne's work alone offers any parallel. My analysis shows the following averages for a few plays representative of various periods : *Love's Labour's Lost* 1 in 2.8 lines, *A*

¹ The texts print as prose. ² The texts misdivide ; see p. 17.

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Midsummer Night's Dream 1 in 2·34, *The Merchant of Venice* 1 in 2, *Macbeth* 1 in 1·7, *Cymbeline* 1 in 1·8, *Coriolanus* and *The Tempest* 1 in 1·5, *Antony and Cleopatra* 1 in 1·35. Few people will, I think, learn without surprise how closely the figure for *Antony and Cleopatra* approaches that of Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon*, which is 1 in 1·2.

Shakespeare, then, as these figures show, had a decided and even remarkable affection for resolved rhythms; but if this is so, and if his text has hitherto been edited, from his own days down to the present, on the assumption that the contrary is the case, it becomes *prima facie* extremely probable that his versification has been freely falsified. It will, I believe, appear from the following pages that this is what has actually happened, and that only by reversing the principle on which the falsification has been made, can we restore a text approximating to what he probably wrote.

That this prevalence of resolutions in Shakespeare's dramatic work has not been recognised long ago is perhaps less remarkable than the cause which has prevented its recognition. This I take to be nothing else than our absurd and indefensible system of prosody, a system devised for the eye instead of for the ear. In literature at any rate there can hardly survive a widespread delusion so extraordinary as the belief that it is a prosody at all. The frequency of trisyllabic and quadrisyllabic feet in all English verse must remain effectually concealed from a reader, though not from a hearer, unless the lines are scanned on a trochaic base,

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so that the normal foot is represented by $\acute{\cup}$.¹ Our traditional and generally accepted metrical system proceeds on an iambic base ($\cup\acute{\cup}$), postulating the admission of a trochee with just the opposite stress, whenever it is found that the system would otherwise break down. Accordingly such rag-time scansion as

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} \acute{\cup} & \cup & | & \cup & \acute{\cup} & | & \acute{\cup} & \cup & | & \cup & \acute{\cup} & || \\ \acute{\cup} & \cup & | & \cup & \acute{\cup} & | & \acute{\cup} & \cup & | & \acute{\cup} & \cup & || \cup \end{array}$$

are of common occurrence, continuity of rhythm being regarded as of no importance. To take an example—scanned by the system in vogue, the lines

Whát is | amíss ? | —Yóu are, | and dó | not knów || it.

Macb. 1. 3. 102.

Ríng the | alár|um-béll. | Múrdér | and tréa||son ! *ib.* 1. 3. 79.

appear to contain no triplet foot, while at the same time the poet is made guilty of adding a 'hypermetrical' syllable at the end of each. The trochaic base reveals two triplet feet in each line, which the ear, to which verse, as verse, makes its first and last appeal, cannot in any case fail to detect :

¹ The terms *trochee*, *trochaic*, *iambus*, *iambic* are used merely for convenience, to denote the relative positions of the stressed and unstressed syllables. Greek prosody, from which these terms are borrowed, is based on quantity (the length of the syllables), and a trochee is strictly a long syllable followed by a short one of half its length, the relation being expressed by the symbols $\acute{\cup}$. An iambus is the reverse of this, $\cup\acute{\cup}$. In English verse, although quantity plays a most important part, stress is the dominating factor, so that for the purposes of our prosody *pity* is a 'trochee' equally with *mainly*, and *whereat* is an 'iambus.' It is unfortunate that we have no terms which could conveniently be substituted.