True Light, True Method: Science, Newtonianism, and the Editing of Shakespeare
in Eighteenth-Century England

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Abstract

The promotion of Shakespeare to the centre of the English literary canon was largely facilitated by ten major eighteenth-century editions of his plays: by Nicholas Rowe (1709), Alexander Pope (1723-25), Lewis Theobald (1733), Thomas Hanmer (1744), William Warburton (1747), Samuel Johnson (1765), George Steevens (1766), Edward Capell (1767-68), Johnson and Steevens (1773) and Edmond Malone (1790). The popularity of Newtonian science in eighteenth-century England helps to explain the mentality that impelled this energetic enterprise. In their Prefaces, the editors describe Shakespeare as a Newton-like genius who understood the underlying principles of human nature and expressed them through his characters. Shakespeare, however, unlike Newton, was not a systematic thinker, and the editors are critical of his language and of his tendency to cater to the low tastes of the Elizabethan theatre. They view him as a genius who understood fundamental truths about human nature and, at the same time, metaphorically, as nature itself—a site of heterogeneity and confusion where the editor must find hidden knowledge. They figure themselves as scientists charged with the task of altering, restoring and annotating Shakespeare's writings. In the editions leading to and including that of Johnson, the editors' focus is on the universality of Shakespeare's discoveries. The early editors promote a transcendental image of Shakespeare as a timeless genius who rose above the relatively barbaric age in which he lived. The two editors following Johnson, however, place an increasing emphasis on Shakespeare's Englishness. While the idea of Shakespeare as a universal genius persists, Steevens and Capell also view him as a specifically English figure whose writings are to a large extent a product of his society. This nationalist emphasis goes hand in hand with an increasingly historical approach to the annotation and textual restoration of Shakespeare. The development of editing as a professional scientific vocation culminates with Malone, who augmented the editorial apparatus with thoroughly researched accounts of Shakespeare's life and theatre. The persistent emphasis on knowledge in the editors' work helps to account for the rise of Shakespeare's canonicity in relation to the Newtonian truth-seeking project of the eighteenth century.

Résumé

L'illumination de la méthode: la science, le newtonianisme et l'édition de
Shakespeare dans l'Angleterre du dix-huitième siècle

La propulsion de Shakespeare vers le centre du canon littéraire anglais fut
grandement facilitée par dix éditions majeures de ses pièces au dix-huitième
siècle : celles de Nicholas Rowe (1709), Alexander Pope (1723-25), Lewis
Theobald (1733), Thomas Hanmer (1744), William Warburton (1747), Samuel
Johnson (1765), George Steevens (1766), Edward Capell (1767-68), Johnson et
Steevens (1773) et Edmond Malone (1790). La popularité de la science
newtonienne en Angleterre au dix-huitième siècle contribue à expliquer la
mentalité qui fit avancer cette énergique initiative. Dans leurs préfaces, les
éditeurs décrivent Shakespeare comme un génie semblable à Newton, qui
comprenait les principes sous-jacents de la nature humaine et les exprimait par le
biais de ses personnages. Or, Shakespeare, contrairement à Newton, n'était pas un
penseur systématique et les éditeurs critiquent son langage et sa tandance à
pourvoir au théâtre élisabéthain de mauvais goût. Ils le voient tel un génie qui
comprenait des vérités fondamentales de la nature humaine et, en même temps de
façon métaphorique, comme la nature humaine elle-même - un lieu
d'hétérogénéité et de confusion dans lequel l'éditeur doit trouver un sens caché. Ils
s'imaginent être des scientifiques dont la charge est de modifier, de restaurer ou
d'annoter l'oeuvre de Shakespeare. Jusqu'à l'édition de Johnson inclusivement, les
éditeurs se concentrent sur l'universalité des découvertes de Shakespeare. Les
premiers éditeurs promouvoient une image transcendantale de Shakespeare en tant
que génie intemporel qui s'élevait au-dessus de l'époque relativement barbare dans
laquelle il vivait. Cependant, les éditeurs qui suivent Johnson manifestent un
intérêt grandissant pour l'anglicitude de Shakespeare. Tandis que l'idée de
Shakespeare comme génie universel persiste, Steevens et Capell le voient aussi en
tant que figure particulièrement anglaise dont l'oeuvre est en grande partie le
produit de sa société. Cet accent national va de pair avec une approche de plus en
plus historique à l'annotation et à la restauration textuelle de Shakespeare.
L'évolution de l'édition en tant que vocation scientifique culmine avec Malone,
qui accroît l'appareil éditorial par des recherches approfondies de comptes rendus
de la vie et du théâtre de Shakespeare. L'insistance sur le savoir dans l'oeuvre des
éditeurs aide à justifier l'ascension du canonisme de Shakespeare par rapport au
projet newtonien de recherche de vérité au dix-huitième siècle.

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Introduction

During the eighteenth century, Shakespeare came to dominate English literary life. In 1700, Shakespeare was viewed in England as one of the leading Renaissance playwrights, but not as supreme. He was performed with reasonable success, but only relatively few people read his plays. During the seventeenth century, his plays were available in print through the Folio editions. The first Folio was published in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death, and went through three subsequent editions in 1632, 1663 and 1685. These expensive books never enjoyed wide circulation and popularity. By 1800, in contrast, Shakespeare's plays were regarded as necessary—and enjoyable—reading for every literate man and woman. Shakespeare had become a central figure in the cultural and literary identity of the English nation. He was no longer viewed simply as *one* of the prominent playwrights of the English past, but as the paramount national poet, a pillar of British cultural identity, and a universal genius whose writings provided timeless insights into human nature. In Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, Henry Crawford observes that "Shakespeare one gets acquainted with without knowing how. It is a part of an Englishman's constitution" (390-91).

The explanation of how Shakespeare was, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, "a part of an Englishman's constitution" lies in the extraordinarily energetic Shakespearean culture of the eighteenth century. In particular, the posthumous promotion of the Renaissance playwright to the centre of the English literary canon was largely facilitated by an editorial enterprise that thrived in

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eighteenth-century England.[1] A succession of ten major editions, energetically marketed by the Tonson firm and other publishers, each promoted as an improvement on previous ones, gave Shakespeare a place of unprecedented cultural authority on the nation's bookshelves. Their editors were Nicholas Rowe (1709), Alexander Pope (1723-25), Lewis Theobald (1733), Thomas Hanmer (1744), William Warburton (1747), Samuel Johnson (1765), George Steevens (1766), Edward Capell (1767-68), Johnson and Steevens (1773) and Edmond Malone (1790). These men emended Shakespeare's text, wrote extensive commentary on his plays and introduced lasting innovations such as character lists and act and scene divisions. Never before had a vernacular author been treated with that kind of editorial attention. In December 1773, Ralph Griffith wrote in the *Monthly Review* that "[a]mong the accumulated proofs of the high esteem in which the writings of Shakespeare are held . . . we may consider the multiplicity of editions which his plays have undergone . . . as not the least" (40: 419). The editions, however, were not simply "proofs" of Shakespeare's reputation. The editors helped to shape Shakespeare's image and define the aims and practices of Shakespearean scholarship for years to come.

The aim of this study is to explain the mentality that propelled the editorial project by examining a previously unexplored factor: the influence of popular Newtonian ways of thinking on the editors' views of Shakespeare and of their own work. The editors rested the argument for Shakespeare's greatness on very different grounds from those assumed by modern Shakespeareans: not on language or on theatre, but on his contribution to knowledge about human nature.

They viewed Shakespeare as an imperfect writer who worked in a flawed theatrical environment, but was nevertheless a genius who understood the underlying principles of human behaviour and expressed them through his characters. There are significant parallels between the editorial image of Shakespeare as a discoverer of underlying laws and the popular image of Isaac Newton. The dissertation therefore argues for the participation of Shakespeare's eighteenth-century editors in the popular scientific culture that venerated Newton and that strove to extend his inquiry into human nature. The intellectual and cultural environment in which the editors worked gave rise to an attitude that held that the Newtonian investigation of nature was fundamentally relevant to the editing of Shakespeare.

Shakespeare, for his editors, is a curiously paradoxical figure: he is nature itself, a site where the textual "scientist" discovers truth despite confusing variety, and at the same time he is a genius who depicts truths about humanity through his precisely drawn characters. The editors re-conceptualize Shakespeare. He is for them a heterogeneous body of dramatic practices that can be refined into a corpus of knowledge about human nature. The value of this veiled knowledge is pertinent to the Enlightenment quest for truth, and therefore invests the editorial project with urgency. The editors implicitly figure themselves as the "Newtons of Shakespeare" who are charged with the task of finding order in Shakespearean diversity and presenting Shakespeare's writings to the public in a true light.

The focus on truth-seeking in the editors' descriptions of Shakespeare and of their own work, when analyzed in the Newtonian context, opens a new way for

understanding the project of eighteenth-century Shakespeare editing. The persistent idea of Shakespeare as a brilliant natural thinker but undisciplined writer has not been adequately explained in the existing body of scholarship about Shakespeare and the eighteenth century. This has probably been the case because the editors' focus on knowledge does not fit in an obvious, compelling way into the cultural materialist framework that has dominated debates about eighteenth-century Shakespeare in the last twenty years or so. In fact, the eighteenth-century emphasis on Shakespeare's science of humanity poses a number of important challenges to the materialist critique of Shakespeare editing.

During the last two decades, scholars such as Michael Bristol, Michael Dobson and Margreta De Grazia have respectively explored the roles that commercial publishing, nationalism and bourgeois ideology played in the formation of Shakespeare's canonicity. In *Big Time Shakespeare*, Bristol focuses his discussion of Shakespeare's promotion in the eighteenth century on the shrewd business strategies of the Tonson publishing house. The Tonson firm was a family-owned publishing empire that capitalized on the rising literacy and the growing interest in books among the English public by publishing editions of Shakespeare and many other major writers. Bristol depicts the Shakespearean publishing project as a commercial enterprise driven by the interests of the Tonsons. He shifts the focus from the practices and opinions of the editors themselves to the economic and ideological environment in which they operated. Literary scholars, Bristol writes, unsurprisingly tend to view the Shakespearean editorial project as "a story of the achievements of editors" who developed a

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"systematic method for reconstructing Shakespeare's original intentions as a

poet." Such narratives, however, "overlook . . . the decisive role played by Jacob

Tonson and his nephews, both in conceiving these editorial projects and in

supervising the production of Shakespeare's works for cultural consumers." The

Tonson firm, Bristol contends, controlled the Shakespearean editorial project, and

employed the editors as professionals hired "to produce a commodity to the

general specifications of the publisher." The relationship that Bristol charts

between commercial interests and scholarship places the former in a superior,

controlling position. "It may well be," he grants, "that a scholarly method for

textual scholarship evolved through the work of the various editors, but that result

would have been a decidedly secondary consequence of Tonson's more general

aim of reproducing Shakespeare as a cultural merchandise" (72).

Bristol does not adhere to a purely materialistic understanding of

Shakespeare's celebrity, and his view of Shakespeare's canonicity is much more

nuanced than his discussion of the Tonsons suggests. He expresses deep

appreciation of Shakespeare's genius, and acknowledges that a complete

explanation of his "extraordinary cultural longevity" cannot rely solely on the

"apparatus of legitimation and control" but must also account for the

"voluntaristic, discretionary, and lucid aspects of human agency" associated with

the judgment and taste of his readers and editors. Bristol quotes Gregory Currie's

opinion, confided to him in a private conversation, that "the ten greatest plays in

the world were probably *all* written by Shakespeare" and admits that he "share[s]

Currie's gut intuition that Shakespeare's plays really do represent a significant

reserve of literary value" (129-31). In his recent work on Shakespeare and the eighteenth century, Bristol credits eighteenth-century editors and commentators with much insight about Shakespeare's genius. Nevertheless, even though Bristol views Shakespeare as an exceptional writer who was justly appreciated by eighteenth-century and later readers, his account of the development of Shakespeare as a profitable commodity, and his view of textual scholarship as a secondary consequence of a commercial enterprise, challenges the editors' conception of Shakespeare's canonicity as a "natural" product of his genius and of their work in terms of a disinterested truth-seeking project.

British nationalism is another important factor in the materialist understanding of Shakespeare's canonicity. In *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation and Authorship, 1660-1769*, Dobson explores the relationship between Shakespeare's growing celebrity and the rise of nationalism in eighteenth-century Britain. Although the focus of his book is on the theatre, Dobson's views about the mentality that informed theatrical adaptations of Shakespeare have influenced scholarship about eighteenth-century editing as well. Dobson provides an account of how, through the alteration and correction of his writings, British society made Shakespeare "as normatively constitutive of [its] national identity as the drinking of afternoon tea"—two things which "have their origins in exactly the same period of expanding trade and vigorous nationalism at home." By giving a vernacular writer the kind of attention previously reserved only for classical texts, the promotion of Shakespeare contributed to the project of glorifying the English nation and its language. This, in turn, necessitated a re-

writing of Shakespeare, so that his works could be "successfully appropriated to fit what became the dominant, nationalistic ideology of mid eighteenth-century England." These aggressive rewritings were done, however, under the guise of objectivity, claiming simply to "redeem the 'essential' Shakespeare" (7, 12, 187). By calling attention to the artificiality of the truth claims behind these adaptations, Dobson advances a view similar to that of Bristol. For both Bristol and Dobson, the rhetoric of objectivity used by Shakespeare's editors and adapters was employed to conceal the ideological or commercial goals which were, in turn, the real forces driving the promotion of Shakespeare.

The boldest challenge to the editors' conception of Shakespeare and of their own work in terms of the search for truth is expressed in *Shakespeare Verbatim*, De Grazia's influential study of Edmond Malone's 1790 edition. De Grazia explains Shakespeare's canonicity in terms of the Enlightenment construction of the concept of individual authorship. She argues that the editorial ideal of authenticity is a construct that reflects historically specific ideas about autonomous authorship and individuality. She accounts for the editors' interest in Shakespeare's characters, and for their veneration of Shakespeare as a supreme author, in terms of the rise of the individual bourgeois subject. De Grazia concludes with a provocative statement about the artificiality of the editorial truth claim when she calls the editorial apparatus "a striking example of how the Enlightenment represented its constructs as Truth, inscribing factual objects and autonomous subjects (each grounded in the other) in the process of reproducing Shakespeare." This constructed authority, she contends, has given the editorial

apparatus its enduring power: "In accordance with an Enlightenment dispensation of factuality and selfhood, of objectivity and subjectivity, it has prepared the text for readers by disciplining it and it has prepared readers for the text by instructing them, meanwhile appearing to have merely reproduced the authentic Shakespeare—verbatim" (226). De Grazia's findings thus negate the ideas of objectivity and universality that underlie the editors' Prefaces. She depicts these ideas as oppressive constructs designed to discipline the readers to regard the edition as a document reflecting objective truth, whereas in fact it is an ideological product.

In addition to their considerable and varied individual contributions, the common collective impact of Bristol, Dobson and De Grazia to the debate about Shakespeare's reputation is that they have demonstrated the dependence of Shakespeare's canonicity on factors that originate outside his art. In doing so, they challenge a more idealistic view of his cultural authority, a view held by the editors, as an organic consequence of universal, undeniable genius. There is little doubt, indeed, as these scholars amply illustrate, that the editorial promotion of Shakespeare had a strong basis in the material and ideological conditions of eighteenth-century Britain. The picture of Shakespeare editing as a commercial nationalistic project tied to bourgeois ideas of individuality also has, however, certain critical blind spots that limit its explanatory power. The problem with the cultural materialist approach to Shakespeare editing is that its practitioners, while mining deep beneath the surface of the editors' work to identify the forces that propelled them, often do not pay sufficient attention to the editorial discourse

itself. Scholars who view the editors primarily in terms of the commercial or ideological environment in which they lived tend not to engage closely enough with what the editors actually write about Shakespeare and about themselves and with what the terms of their discussion meant in the culture in which they lived. Their understanding of the editors does not place much importance on how the editors understood themselves and Shakespeare, and why, but focuses instead on how material and cultural factors can explain the editorial project. Consequently, the Prefaces, where the editors express their views of Shakespeare and of their own work, have received only limited critical examination in recent scholarship, and the full intellectual content of the editors' salient preoccupations—their emphasis on character as an instrument of truth and a means of understanding human nature and their drive towards the correction of Shakespeare—has not been accounted for.

This study pays close attention to the Prefaces because these introductory essays function as statements of editorial vision and intent, and some of the most revealing evidence about the mentality that propelled the editorial project is preserved in the language and patterns of thinking that underlie them. The critical immersion in the Prefaces does not, however, imply a scholarship contained entirely within the text, ignoring the social environment in which the editors operated. On the contrary, the focus on knowledge in the Prefaces reveals a historical, cultural dimension to the editorial project that has escaped the attention of literary criticism. A key context necessary for a more complete understanding of Shakespeare editing has been overlooked. This context is the popularity of

science in eighteenth-century England, and in particular the veneration of Newton.

Who was Isaac Newton for people in the eighteenth century? What was his position in the popular culture of eighteenth-century England and why is he important in order to account for the focus on knowledge in the Prefaces to Shakespeare?

The author of the groundbreaking *Principia* (1687) and *Opticks* (1704), Newton stood at the centre of the scientific culture of eighteenth-century England as a figurehead and a model of an exemplary thinker. His achievements in the natural sciences were monumental. He discovered the laws of motion, revolutionized the understanding of light and, at the same time as Wilhelm von Leibniz, developed calculus. Eighteenth-century men and women admired Newton for revealing the previously hidden principles that govern physical reality, making it subject to analysis and technological manipulation as never before. The English natural philosopher was regarded as the herald of a new period in the growth of knowledge in which physical reality would become knowable and predictable through precise laws. At the same time as he was hailed as a universal genius, Newton was also adopted as a specifically British icon. His achievements were seen as synonymous with Britain's national destiny, with its special role in relation to the development of knowledge. Newton's freedom of mind, rising above established scientific dogma, was linked in popular discourses to the relative political freedom of British society. At the same time, Newton's promoters invoked his orderly system of nature as a model for what

English society should be: powerful, stable, bound by laws. J.T. Desaguliers, for instance, one of the most prolific popularizers of Newton, brought natural philosophy to bear upon British political ideals in *The Newtonian System of the World, the Best Model of Government*. He describes an orderly political system in terms of gravitational attraction:

> The *limited Monarchy*, whereby our Liberties, Rights and
>
> Privileges are so well secured to us, as to make us happier than all
>
> the Nations round about us, seems to be a lively Image of our
>
> System; and the Happiness we enjoy under *His* present Majesty's
>
> Government makes us sensible, that ATTRACTION is now as
>
> universal in the Political, as the Philosophical World. (v)

The interest in Newton was not confined to a small specialized élite. His discoveries inspired a broad and multi-faceted industry of popularization that engaged the public at large. At precisely the same time as the Shakespearean editorial project was gaining momentum, Newtonianism, the culture of adulation for Newton, was captivating English men and women. Lectures, sermons, books, magazines, public demonstrations, scientific poetry and coffee-house conversations helped to disseminate his discoveries far beyond the bounds of narrow scholarly circles. The *Monthly Magazine* published a regular section of "mathematical correspondence," a fact which attests to the readers' familiarity with and interest in mathematics and its applications. G.S. Rousseau notes that by the mid century, works on natural philosophy were the most popular among printed books (202). It is therefore reasonable to assume that virtually every

reader and scholar of Shakespeare during that period also had at least some familiarity with and appreciation for Newtonian thought—something which certainly cannot be assumed about readers and scholars of Shakespeare today.

In the twenty-first century, we do not tend to think about Newton as relevant to Shakespeare because their two realms have come to be seen as autonomous or even antithetical to one another. The eighteenth century, however, as numerous scholars have demonstrated, had a highly interconnected view of knowledge, and literature and the natural sciences were in a much closer dialogue than they are today. Following Newton's death in 1727, poets and writers worked side by side with lecturers, sermon preachers, and experiment demonstrators to communicate Newton's discoveries to the public. In "To the Memory of Sir Isaac Newton," James Thomson echoes a widely shared sentiment about the relationship between scientific truth and aesthetics when he calls Newton's discoveries an "infinite source/Of beauty" (II. 119-20).

Shakespeare's editors, like so many of their fellow men and women of letters in the eighteenth century, participated in the Newtonian spirit. Pope, who was deeply impressed by William Whiston's 1713 Newtonian astronomical lectures (Mack 511) wrote what are still the most frequently quoted lines of admiration for the scientific genius: "Nature, and Nature's Laws lay hid in Night./God said, *Let Newton be!/* and All was *Light*" (6: 317). Newton, Pope acknowledges, is extraordinary among God's creations because he possesses the mental power to shed light on the creation of which he is a part. These verses were not Pope's only contribution to Newtonian culture. John Conduitt, the

husband of Newton's niece, also recruited Pope's help to write a dedication to the Queen for Newton's *Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms* (Rogers 204). The other editors were similarly interested in Newton. Theobald subscribed to a thick coursebook in Newtonian science entitled *A View of Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophy* (Pemberton xlvii). Warburton demonstrated detailed knowledge of the *Principia* and the *Opticks* in his notes to Pope's *Essay on Man*. Johnson had a long-standing fascination with the natural sciences, mathematics and technology, which Richard B. Schwartz documents in his book-length study, *Samuel Johnson and the New Science*.

The literary world did not sing Newton's praise in one uniform uncritical voice. Jonathan Swift's satires of theories of gravity in *A Tale of the Tub* and *Gulliver's Travels* are two notable instances of early eighteenth-century sceptical responses to natural philosophy and to the culture of adulation created around it. Pope's *Essay on Man* illustrates how admiration for Newton co-existed with concern about the growing power of the natural sciences. On the one hand, Pope's poem is so rich in scientific imagery and ways of thinking that William Powell Jones calls its first two epistles Pope's "scientific poem" (139), identifying it with a genre generally dedicated to the hyperbolic celebration of scientific achievement. Indeed, Pope's poetic investigation of man and of morality is guided by the scientific drive of his age, a fact made clear by the reference frame that he adopts in the title of the first epistle: "Of the Nature and State of Man, with Respect to the Universe" (3: 9). Pope, however, is also anxious to define the limits of science. He insists that while natural philosophy makes it possible to

construct powerful models for understanding the world that God created, it cannot

explain the secrets of creation itself, in particular not the creation of human

beings:

> He, who thro' vast immensity can pierce,
>
> See worlds on worlds compose one universe
>
> Observe how system into system runs,
>
> What other planets circle other suns,
>
> What vary'd being peoples ev'ry star,
>
> May tell why Heav'n has made us as we are. (3: I. 23-28)

Pope mocks the excessive adulation for Newton when he imagines a more

advanced civilization not prone to such idolatry, a civilization for whom a person

like Newton would be regarded as inferior rather than superior:

> Superior beings, when of late they saw
>
> A mortal man unfold all Nature's law
>
> Admir'd such wisdom in an earthly shape,
>
> And shew'd a Newton as we shew an Ape. (3: II. 31-34)

Pope's anxiety that science might invade the space of theological and moral

questions and promote excessive pride should not be confused with lack of

appreciation for, or interest in, Newton (who was himself deeply devout). While

satirizing some of the cultural responses to Newton, Pope uses Newtonian

knowledge to advance his own moral argument. Newton's discoveries, as Powell

Jones demonstrates, gave a new focus to many old moral problems, and questions

such as vanity and pride became increasingly thought about in the context of the

search for scientific knowledge (55). This is clear, for instance, when Pope

invokes universal gravitation, a Newtonian discovery, to mock the absurdity of

human self centeredness: "Shall gravitation cease, if you go by?" (3: IV.128).

Rather than criticize Newton's achievements, then, Pope uses them as a rich body

of metaphors with which to discuss moral problems. He implicitly compares

human beings to planets and suggests that like a heavenly body which is held in

its place by the invisible, yet inviolable, law of universal gravitation, humans must

submit to providence and avoid the vain temptation to alter their position in the

universe by aspiring to control nature:

> In Pride, in reas'ning Pride, our error lies;
>
> All quit their sphere, and rush into the skies . . . .
>
> And who but wishes to invert the laws
>
> Of Order, sins against th' Eternal Cause. (3: I.123-24, 129-130)

Pope's strategy of using metaphors gleaned from science to fortify his moral

argument demonstrates his acceptance of, and appreciation for, Newtonian

mechanics as an accurate depiction of physical nature. The belief in order that

can be understood by human beings is, indeed, the very premise upon which he

bases his poem: "The gen'ral ORDER, since the world began,/is kept in

NATURE, and is kept in Man" (3. 171-72). The "scene of man," Pope writes, is a

"mighty maze," but "not without a plan" (3: I. 5-6). Indeed, eighteenth-century

thinkers tended to view human reality as fundamentally similar to physical reality

in the sense that it embodied an underlying regularity. They believed that the

confusion of the human world, just like the disorder of nature, was only apparent,

and that human behaviour was guided by universal principles that could be deciphered. Thus "The science of Human Nature," Pope states in the Design to the Essay, "is, like all other sciences, reduced to a *few clear points*" (3: 10-11). The optimistic outlook about the existence of order and the attainability of knowledge, to which Pope's *Essay* gives potent expression, was shared by the literary world at large.

The deep impact that science made on the culture in which the editors lived helped to shape their view of Shakespeare. The editors were able to think about their subject in terms of the search for knowledge because Newton's successes in understanding the laws that govern physical matter inspired broad optimism about finding truth in other areas of investigation. People working in diverse fields turned to Newton as a model for emulation, hoping to discover universal principles. Patricia Fara, in *Newton: The Making of Genius,* observes that by the end of the century

> few cultural spheres remain[ed] untouched by Newton's influence. . . .
> various versions of Newtonian principles were being applied in fields as
> diverse as politics, sociology, aesthetics and biology. At their heart lay the
> fundamental quest for guiding laws. Just as Newton had provided simple
> mathematical relationships governing the natural world, so too, it was
> believed, could laws be found to describe every aspect of life. (62)

Mordechai Feingold similarly remarks that

> Newton's influence transcended the domain of science. During a time
> when the mathematical sciences and natural philosophy were integral to a

much broader encyclopedia of knowledge, the apparent success of these

domains set an example of so-called superior knowledge for other

disciplines to emulate: the search for rational, universal principles became

the *modus vivendi* for all researchers, regardless of field. (xi)

Human nature, in particular, became the focus of scientifically inspired

investigation. The effort to study human behaviour in a systematic way

underwent unprecedented growth during the eighteenth century. The inquiries

into human nature that were influenced by Newton included, among several

others, John Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding*, David Hume's *Treatise of

Human Nature*, David Hartley's *Observation on Man* and George Berkeley's *A

New Theory of Vision*. In the *Essay*, Locke, Newton's friend and correspondent,

defines philosophy, which to him is "nothing but the true knowledge of things"

(13), as encompassing physical reality as well as human reality—both being

subject to rational inquiry. Hume believed that association in the world of ideas

operated like gravitation in physical nature, and he formulates three laws of

association, analogous to Newton's three laws of motion, by which ideas are

connected to each other in the imagination. Hartley, a physician who admired

Newton in particular and mathematical inquiry more generally, formed a series of

propositions about the role of vibrations, the neurological processes of the brain,

in sensation by using concepts from Newton and Locke. His aim was to discern

the "general laws according to which the sensations and motions are performed,

and our ideas generated" (li), just as Newton formulated general laws in the

Principia. Newtonian optics were also influential in eighteenth-century inquiries

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into the operations of the human mind. Berkeley, who disagreed with Newton in some areas, nevertheless applied his optical concepts to explain how ideas are formed in the mind through sight.[2]

Clearly, when the editors speak about Shakespeare in Newtonian terms, they do not think about him as a philosopher such as Locke, Hume or Berkeley. His inquiry into human nature was very different from the scientifically inspired philosophical investigations mentioned above. And yet, in a fundamental way, the editing of Shakespeare and the development of eighteenth-century philosophy were propelled by a common desire: the drive for knowledge about humanity. The editors' conception of Shakespeare as an investigator of human nature is of a piece with the popular esteem paid to the scientific search for general principles in eighteenth-century England, and their conception of themselves is fashioned with a powerful idea of editing as a truth-seeking enterprise.

Why, then, does my study focus on Newton specifically and not on the search for knowledge in more broadly defined terms? Because, as Rob Iliffe points out, "during the eighteenth century Newton became the first natural philosopher genius and thereafter his life defined what such a person was" ("Introduction" xiv). Similarly, the editors, and other eighteenth-century commentators, viewed Shakespeare not simply as one of many participants in a truth-seeking project, but as superior to all other poets in his understanding of humanity. William Richardson echoed a widely shared view when he wrote that Shakespeare was "superior to all mankind in the invention of characters" (*Philosophical Analysis* 194-95). Both Newton and Shakespeare had a unique

iconic position in their respective fields. The editors' claims about the superiority of Shakespeare compared to other poets recall similar claims made about Newton in relation to other natural philosophers. Shakespeare and Newton had parallel cultural positions in the "mythology" of eighteenth-century England, each celebrated as the "figurehead" of his respective field. While their two fields were different, they were not viewed in opposition to one another. Rather, literature and the natural sciences were both seen as participating in a broad common search for knowledge, and the rationale for the claims about Shakespeare and Newton's supreme status in their fields was in each case based on a similar criterion—their contribution to knowledge.

It is not surprising that Shakespeare and Newton were both often the subjects of similar hyperboles in the literature of the period: that they exceeded the achievement of the ancients, that they were the glory and ornament of the nation, that they possessed supreme insight into nature, and that they were the greatest who ever lived. For example, the famous lines in David Garrick's 1769 Jubilee Ode that "*Nature* led him by the hand,/Instructed him in all she knew,/And gave him absolute command" (10-12) resemble Desaguliers' description in *The Newtonian System of the World* that Nature "gladly show[ed]" Newton "all her secret Ways" (117-18). Shakespeare and Newton were also often positioned together in the iconography of the period. When James West, the President of the Royal Society (1768-1772), decorated his new country mansion, he commissioned marble busts of Shakespeare and Newton to stand side by side (Fara 55-6). The English painter George Romney sketched an image entitled "Newton and the

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prism" in one of the opening pages of his volume "Drawings for Shakespeare,"

now at the Shakespeare Folger Library. These visual examples indicate a

closeness between the images of Shakespeare and Newton that should be taken

into account in explaining the focus on knowledge in the editors' Prefaces.

What follows, then, is an examination of how the popular scientific culture

of eighteenth-century England centred on Newton can enrich our understanding of

the editors' views of Shakespeare, and their own role in relation to him. The

approach of this study is one of comparison, examining the editors' views of

Shakespeare and of their own work side by side with popular views of Newton,

and emphasizing basic conceptual similarities. Like every comparison, the one

here has its limitations, and it should not be carried to extremes. The editors did

not literally think about Shakespeare as a scientific investigator of human nature;

nor did they think about themselves as Newtonian scientists. They do not

mention Newton explicitly when they argue for Shakespeare's value.[3] They do

not have to. Newtonianism was a part of the air that British men and women in

the eighteenth century breathed, and the scientifically-informed language and

patterns of thinking that animate the Prefaces were recognizable to the readers as

inspired by the scientific search for knowledge. My reasoning in making this

claim will become clear if one bears in mind what Feingold writes about Kant's

introduction to his 1787 edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Feingold

suggests that even though Newton clearly influenced Kant's effort to reform

metaphysics,

yet nowhere in the introduction did Kant mention Newton by name, except in one footnote. Quite simply, there was no need for him to do so. By 1787, the conception of the natural sciences laid out by Kant would have been instantly identifiable to contemporaries as "Newtonian science." Nor would these contemporaries have failed to detect in Kant's determination to make metaphysics a "science" yet another attempt to extrapolate the Newtonian success story to other domains. (xi)

In England, Newtonian ways of thinking were recognizable well before 1787. Rousseau writes that "abundant evidence exists to support the contention that from roughly 1680 to 1750 science, or natural philosophy, *meant* Newton." He describes Newton as a "vast region of the literate imagination" that affected any person engaged in a search for knowledge (215-16). Newton, to the editors and to their readers, was not a remote or irrelevant thinker. Many aspects of the Prefaces that may seem fuzzy or strange to present-day readers would be recognizable to their original readership as inspired by Newtonianism— recognizable, indeed, without the need to mention Newton explicitly. That the editing of Shakespeare was, in many ways, also "yet another attempt" to "extrapolate the Newtonian success story" to another realm is precisely the argument that I make here. This "yet another attempt," however, unlike some other less successful eighteenth-century Newtonian ventures, was an especially important one because it helped to shape our view of Shakespeare and his texts to this day.

Eighteenth-century Shakespeare has been discussed in relation to many

contexts, including the materialist contexts surveyed above, as well as the

contexts of neo-classic scholarship and Biblical scholarship.[4] And yet, the

Newtonian context has never been brought to the forefront, even though it was

absolutely crucial to the cultural life of eighteenth-century England. The

Newtonian lens brings into focus a background that was pertinent to the editors'

work, but it also involves the risk of distortion, of elevating one factor above other

important ones. By focusing on Newton, I do not mean to suggest that science

was the paramount shaper of eighteenth-century editorial attitudes. Nationalism,

religion, commercial publishing and neo-classicism all functioned together to

inform editorial attitudes to Shakespeare. Science is one piece of a puzzle, but a

powerful piece that occasionally had the power to transcend other factors. Most

studies of Shakespeare editing tend to emphasize the differences among the

editors. For instance, Pope was a Catholic, and Theobald's attacks on his editorial

methods involved insults directed at his religious affiliation (Mack 431; Jarvis

64). Newtonianism is often understood by historians as a movement that served

the interests of the Protestant establishment in England.[5] Pope's Catholicism,

however, did not prevent him from nurturing an avid interest in Newton. Indeed,

Newtonianism was a unifying factor that gave the editors much in common in

terms of their attitude to Shakespeare and to the profession of editing, despite

their individual differences.

Pope's Newtonianism, despite his Catholicism, also serves as a reminder

that participation in the popular scientific culture of the eighteenth century cannot

be reduced to purely material and ideological interests, but must allow for the phenomenon of sincere interest in the truth. Similarly, the editorial enthusiasm for Shakespeare cannot be reduced to purely material factors. The editors were men with commercial interests, cultural and personal prejudices and professional flaws. Their egos were often as important to them as was the restoration of Shakespeare. Their view of Shakespeare was implicated in British nationalism and in emerging imperialism. They were, however, also interested in finding truths in Shakespeare. The quasi-scientific mentality that the editors bring to their work illuminates how they thought about the value of Shakespeare's art—as a body of work that contains general truths about human nature—and how they thought about the value of their own work—as finding order and truth in a confusing body of materials.

This study, then, shares cultural materialism's attention to the social milieu in which the editors operated. It differs from cultural materialism, however, by contextualizing the editors' work *in their own terms*. Rather than relegate the editors' words and practices to a secondary status, less important than their "true" material and ideological motivations, I explore an ideological context that enables us to take seriously what the editors write about Shakespeare and about themselves. Newtonianism provides an important intervention in the materialist critique of Shakespeare. It shows that the editors' dedication to finding truth in Shakespeare was at least as important to the development of their enterprise as any previously studied material or ideological factor.

My exploration of the connection between Shakespeare editing and the popular scientific culture of eighteenth-century England will proceed in four steps. The first chapter explores the emergence of the scientific approach to Shakespeare by examining the five editions published between 1725[6] and 1765, four decades which were the heyday of Newtonianism. The editors working during that period advance the idea that Shakespeare's discovery of the universal principles of human nature, principles embodied in his characters, is his major achievement. They distinguish themselves from the Folio compilers by showing relatively low esteem for Shakespeare's language and theatre. Their assessment of Shakespeare as a discoverer of knowledge but an undisciplined writer provided a powerful rationale for the editorial alteration of his writings. The editors figure their attempts to rescue the essence of Shakespeare's genius from the corruption of the past as well as from his own imperfect practices in scientifically inspired terms, appealing in particular to Newton's *Opticks*.

Chapter 2 examines the editions of Steevens and Capell, which elaborate the scientifically inspired praise for Shakespeare as a genius who took his ideas directly from Nature, but also develop a more culturally specific view of him as a British hero whose writings are a reflection of his society. The argument that Shakespeare's plays must be studied in their cultural and historical context was instrumental for the development of a historically informed approach to editing.[7] It went hand in hand with a growing interest in Shakespeare's language, which fostered minute editorial attention to the details of the text. This close attention to language and history was a significant contrast to the more abstract, trans-

historical view of Shakespeare in the earlier editions. At the same time, the underlying motivation for the editorial project remained the same: a belief that Shakespeare's writings contained valuable knowledge, and a desire to access that knowledge through the careful inductive study of the details of his canon.

Chapter 3 focuses on the culmination of eighteenth-century editorial efforts: Malone's celebrated 1790 edition. More than any other editor, Malone was self-consciously dedicated to making editing a knowledge-seeking science. He spent countless hours collecting archival information about Shakespeare and writing accounts of his life and theatre. He dedicated his life to the study of Shakespeare much as Newton dedicated his life to the discovery of truth. Ironically, however, the picture of Shakespeare that emerges from the work of the most Newton-like of Shakespeare's editors is less Newton-like than that which emerges from the earlier editions. For Malone, Shakespeare was not a disinterested, trans-historical investigator of human nature, but a man whose writing practices were largely determined by his personal experiences, as well as by his cultural and professional environment. Nevertheless, the idea that Shakespeare's value lies in his discovery of universally valid knowledge about human nature persists, and it is this idea that drives Malone to his calling as a scientist of Shakespeare.

Chapter 4 discusses the case study of the editorial treatment of *Hamlet*. The editors' desire to identify simple underlying principles in Shakespeare was frustrated by the inherent ambiguities of Hamlet, the play's hero. Nevertheless, their determination to find method in Hamlet's character shows the power of

science in shaping their mentality. I conclude by arguing that despite significant changes that occurred throughout the century, the story of eighteenth-century Shakespeare editing is ultimately the story of the remarkable endurance of two interrelated, scientifically inspired ideas: Shakespeare as a genius of human nature, and editing as a truth-seeking inductive discipline designed to uncover the truths contained in his writing.

[1] The theatre also played an important role in the promotion of Shakespeare. This dissertation, however, deals with the elevation of Shakespeare through the edited book and does not discuss the theatrical culture of the eighteenth century.

[2] See A. Wolf's *A History of Science, Technology, and Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1952) for a detailed study of studies of human nature influenced by Newton.

[3] There is one *possible* reference to Newton at the end of Warburton's Preface. Warburton refers to a rumour that a great philosopher who spent his life looking through the telescope dismissed editing as an insignificant endeavour, and defends editing against the accusation. It is not clear, however, who this philosopher is, and it should be noted that Newton himself engaged in extensive textual, if not editorial, work with the Hebrew Bible, so the reference to editing as insignificant would be strange if in fact it was articulated by him.

[4] See for example Colin Franklin's *Shakespeare Domesticated: The Eighteenth-Century Editions* (Brookfield: Gower Publishing, 1991), Simon Jarvis' *Scholars and Gentlemen: Shakespearean Textual Criticism and Representations of Scholarly Labour, 1725-1765* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1995), Peter Seary's *Lewis Theobald and the Editing of Shakespear* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), R.D. Stock's *Samuel Johnson and Neoclassical Dramatic Theory: The Intellectual Context of the Preface to Shakespeare* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973) and Marcus Walsh's *Shakespeare, Milton and Eighteenth-Century Literary Editing: the Beginnings of Interpretative Scholarship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[5] See for example Betty Dobbs and Margaret Jacob's *Newton and the Culture of Newtonianism* (New York: Humanity Books, 1995).

[6] I begin with Pope's edition because the first edition of the eighteenth century, that of Rowe, was basically a reprint of the Fourth Folio.

[7] The historically informed approach to editing began with Theobald, but developed much more vigorously during the second half of the eighteenth century.

Chapter 1

Isaac Newton and Shakespeare's Editors: From Pope to Johnson

In the Preface to his eight-volume *Works of Shakespeare*, Warburton

advances the following argument for the value of his author:

> Of all the literary exercitations of speculative Men, whether designed for the
>
> use or entertainment of the World, there are none of so much importance, or
>
> what are more our immediate concern, than those which let us into the
>
> knowledge of our Nature. Others may exercise the Reason or amuse the
>
> Imagination; but these only can improve the Heart, and form the human
>
> Mind to wisdom. Now, in this Science, our *Shakespear* is confessed to
>
> occupy the foremost place; whether we consider the amazing sagacity with
>
> which he investigates every hidden spring and wheel of human Action; or
>
> his happy manner of communicating this knowledge, in the just and living
>
> paintings which he has given us of all our Passions, Appetites, and Pursuits.
>
> (1: xxiv)

Warburton's assessment is arrestingly different in its focus from twenty-first-

century accounts of Shakespeare's worth. Today, we take it for granted that

Shakespeare's canonicity is founded on his rich, original use of the English

language and on his theatrical flair. Virtually every present-day work about

Shakespeare's career is premised on a deep appreciation for his linguistic abilities

and stagecraft. In *Will in the World*, for instance, his imaginative biography of

Shakespeare, Stephen Greenblatt portrays Shakespeare as a young boy "obsessed with the magic of words." His extraordinary natural attraction to verbal expression, coupled with his aptitude for the stage, enabled Shakespeare, in due course, to write what Greenblatt characterizes as "simply the most beautiful language any English audience had ever heard" (23, 49). This kind of assessment reflects the veneration of Shakespeare's language and theatrical ability which emerged towards the end of the eighteenth century and continued to develop thereafter. Warburton, however, does not focus on language or on the theatre. Instead, his appreciation of Shakespeare rests on "Knowledge," "Science" and "Nature."

Of course, the terms "Science" and "Nature" as Warburton uses them did not mean to him what they mean to us. The term scientist as we understand it today first appeared only in 1830 in William Whewell's *The History of the Inductive Sciences* (Turner 511). Science, in the eighteenth century, was a much broader term than it is today. It signified any branch of knowledge, not a discipline opposed to the arts, while "Nature" meant the full range of phenomena, not simply what today we would consider "natural phenomena." Nevertheless, despite these different connotations, these two terms as employed by Warburton are related to what we mean by "science" today because they resonate with the idea of searching for objective knowledge about the world. Warburton uses these terms to communicate the idea that Shakespeare's understanding and accurate portrayal of the universal traits of humanity are his major achievement. He depicts Shakespeare as a supreme investigator who reveals the regularity of

human behaviour. As such, Shakespeare, even though he is not a natural philosopher, shares a crucial characteristic with the figurehead of natural philosophy in eighteenth-century England, Newton: the ability to understand fundamental principles of nature. The praise for discovering previously hidden principles was precisely the panegyric closely associated with Newton. By suggesting that Shakespeare shared an extraordinary capacity for understanding nature with Newton, the editors help to build an argument for the importance of his writings. The idea that Shakespeare occupies "the foremost place" in the science that reveals the hidden springs and wheels of human action resonates powerfully indeed in a culture deeply invested in the search for the regularities underlying the natural and human world, for the simple laws that explain and unify diverse phenomena.

The view of Shakespeare as a discoverer of truth is tellingly different from our familiar image of him as a theatrical artist of words. Simply put, editors today do not instruct their readers to read Shakespeare in order to learn about the universal principles that govern human behaviour. To begin with, the ideas of objective truth and universality upon which the desire to discover underlying principles is based have become all but taboos in today's literary culture. Furthermore, we tend to expect analytic knowledge about human nature to come from the social sciences, not from literature. Shakespeare may provide interesting insights into human nature through his characters, but we do not tend to view knowledge as the primary function of his art. Instead, our appreciation for his plays is channelled through the reference frames of language and theatre, and

most readers today would agree that Shakespeare's exploration of humanity

cannot be thought about in separation from his linguistic craft and stagecraft.

For Warburton, on the other hand, this separation clearly exists. There is

nothing in Warburton's praise that mirrors Greenblatt's enthusiasm for

Shakespeare's linguistic skill. Warburton does not admire the beauty of the

bard's language for beauty's sake. He bases his appreciation instead on

Shakespeare's strength as a thinker, on his ability to produce "just and living

paintings" whose primary purpose is to communicate knowledge. Warburton

describes these paintings not as theatrical characters, well crafted for the stage,

but as the findings of an investigator. He thus gestures towards a scientifically

inspired view of Shakespeare's characters as embodiments of general truths.

Warburton's choice of the word "just," a word which connotes both justice and

precision, to describe these characters enhances the scientific tone of the passage.

It recalls the Enlightenment's faith in the ethical function of knowledge-seeking

inquiry, what Rousseau calls "a belief that the increased study of [a] subject

would eventually improve the lot of common man" (197-98). In alluding to the

moral function of Shakespeare's writing, Warburton does not mention anything

about the resolution of his plots, the ethical character of his heroes, or any of the

other features that would traditionally be associated with moral instruction. In his

assessment, what makes Shakespeare's works morally useful is the fact that they

reflect the world accurately and can therefore help to form the readers' minds to

knowledge. This mirrors the claims of Newton's promoters, that his correct

understanding of nature will improve the state of humanity.

The focus on knowledge in the praise of Shakespeare is not specific to Warburton. Far from it, it is a bracing feature of the Prefaces examined in this chapter. For the editors discussed here, the accurate depiction of humanity through the discovery of underlying principles is Shakespeare's chief recommendation. Despite their clashes over method—most famously the feud between Pope and Theobald which will be discussed in the last section of this chapter—the editors express remarkably similar views about Shakespeare's contribution to knowledge. For Pope, Shakespeare's characters "are so much Nature her self" that it is "a sort of injury to call them by so distant a name as Copies of her." Not even Homer, Pope contends, drew his creations "so immediately from the fountains of Nature." Shakespeare warrants this praise because of the precision with which he depicts nature: "his descriptions are still exact; all his metaphors appropriated, and remarkably drawn from the true nature and inherent qualities of each subject" (1: ii, x). For Theobald, "Knowledge of human Nature . . . is . . . our Author's Masterpiece," and his plays are the result of his "Researches into Nature" (1: xxiv-xxv). Johnson describes Shakespeare's characters as the "just representations of general nature" that fulfil the mind's yearning to "repose on the stability of truth." He depicts Shakespeare as an "exact surveyor" of the world who, more than most writers, "advanced the studies which he cultivated" (7: 61-62, 89-90).[1]

Shakespeare's language does not play an essential role in the editors' praise of him. While they praise Shakespeare for his supreme understanding of human nature, these editors do not venerate Shakespeare's expressive faculty as

the essence of his genius. On the contrary, they view his language as a disturbingly heterogeneous mixture of virtue and vice. In other words, while in some instances Shakespeare's words give beautiful and fluent expression to his insights about nature, they often fail to match the greatness of his understanding. Shakespeare, as the editors imagine him, is more concerned with the subjects and ideas about which he writes than with finding the best words in which to express them. Warburton observes that

> no one thought clearer, or argued more closely than this immortal Bard.
> But his Superiority of Genius less needing the Intervention of Words in
> the Act of Thinking, when he came to draw out his Contemplations into
> Discourse, he took up (as he was hurried on by the Torrent of his Matter)
> with the first Words that lay in his Way. (1: xv-xvi)

The Shakespeare that Warburton imagines is not an artist preoccupied with words. Shakespeare is a thinker passionately dedicated to "Matter," obsessed with the subjects into which he inquires. He is engaged in an intellectual endeavour for which language is but an imperfect tool, not an end in itself. Hurried by the urgency of his investigation, Shakespeare often neglects to select his terms carefully. Far from depending on language, the superiority of his genius is defined precisely in terms of his ability to understand reality without the "intervention" of words. Warburton does say that Shakespeare "argued closely," but his arguments were not expressed in a clear language. The notion of argument here does not refer to the quality of rhetorical polish, but rather to the coherence of Shakespeare's thoughts, to the idea that his plays contain a valuable

body of materials that can serve as an instrument for teaching about human nature.

This divorcing of the essence of Shakespeare's genius from his linguistic practices differs not only from the veneration of his writings that we are accustomed to today. It also diverges radically from the attitudes found in the seventeenth-century Folios. John Heminges and Henry Condell, the Folio compilers, were deeply appreciative of Shakespeare's expressive talent and saw no tension between the content and form of his writings, between his understanding of the world and his ability to put that understanding into fluent words. In their preface addressed "To the great variety of Readers," they write that Shakespeare "as he was a happie imitator of Nature, was a most gentle expresser of it. His mind and hand went together: And what he thought, he uttered with that easinesse, that wee have scarse received from him a blot in his papers" (A3). The eighteenth-century editors disagreed sharply with the idea that Shakespeare's understanding and writing always flew harmoniously together. The editors' dissatisfaction with Shakespeare's use of language is one of the trenchant common features of their Prefaces. The editors acknowledge that in many instances Shakespeare did write beautifully, but their argument for his worth rests primarily on knowledge, not on his use of language. When it comes to knowledge of human nature, the editors are in awe of Shakespeare. Their discussions of his language, on the other hand, balance praise with sanction. For Pope, Shakespeare is the "fullest subject for Criticism" because he offers the most numerous instances not only of "Beauties," but also of "Faults." Pope contends

that just as Shakespeare "has certainly written better, so he has perhaps written worse, than any other" poet. While he can write superbly, Shakespeare, in Pope's view, is also prone to the "most verbose and bombast Expression; the most pompous Rhymes, and thundering Versification." His language, therefore, often conceals rather than reveals his understanding. Pope likens Shakespeare's genius in his lesser moments to "some Prince of a Romance in the disguise of a Shepherd or Peasant" (1: i, iv, v). The trope of subdued or concealed strength continues in the subsequent Prefaces. Theobald writes that Shakespeare "was a *Sampson* in Strength" who "suffer'd some such *Dalilah*," a metaphor for the poor standards of taste prevailing in early modern England, "to give him up to the *Philistines*" (1: xvi). Johnson, on his part, invokes another mythical temptress as a metaphor for Shakespeare's linguistic vulnerability when he memorably dubs Shakespeare's quibbles his "fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it" (7: 74).

The Newtonian Search for Knowledge and the Editors' View of Shakespeare's Characters

The admiration for Shakespeare's knowledge of human nature combined with the dissatisfaction with his language leads to a better understanding of the preoccupation with character in the editing of Shakespeare when this attitude is viewed in light of the popular interest in the study of human nature that animated the culture in which Shakespeare's editors lived. Character was the pillar of eighteenth-century Shakespeare criticism. Shakespeare's language might be flawed, but the editors rest their case for Shakespeare's superiority on his ability

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to apply his understanding of human nature to the creation of individual characters. They promote Shakespeare's characters as instruments of truth about humanity. There is a parallel between their view of these characters and the admiration for Newton's laws: both were celebrated as creations that reveal universal principles through the careful study of diverse particular phenomena. Newton's method moved from the systematic observation of nature towards general synthesis and the discovery of laws. He made it possible to explain apparently disparate events such as the fall of an apple from a tree and the movement of a planet around the sun with a single simple unifying equation: the law of universal gravitation. Shakespeare's characters, the editors argue, also embody the universal principles that Shakespeare was able to induce while he observed the confusing, diverse details of human life.

The logic of the editors' arguments about Shakespeare's characters as embodiments of universal truths suggests that they have internalized, through the popular scientific culture to which they were exposed, a Newtonian conception of how truths about nature are to be investigated. The editors make two interrelated claims about Shakespeare's characters. First, they stress the individual distinction of these creations. Pope says that in Shakespeare, each character "is as much an Individual, as those in Life itself" (1: iii). Theobald lavishes similar praise when he exclaims: "What Draughts of Nature! What Variety of Originals, and how differing each from the other!" (1: iii). Warburton says that "*Shakespear*: Who, widely excelling in the Knowledge of Human Nature, hath given to his infinitely varied Pictures of it, such Truth of Design, such Force of Drawing, such Beauty

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of Colouring" (1: xiii). When Johnson calls Shakespeare's characters just representations of general nature, he does not intend "general" to signify abstractions detached from experience, innate ideas from which particulars are deduced. On the contrary, the empirical attitude that he adopts prescribes that knowledge must reach the mind through the senses and experience. Above all authors, Johnson says, "Shakespeare excells in accommodating his sentiments to real life." He is "the poet of nature [who] holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of . . . life" (7: 62-63). His general discoveries are therefore empirical in nature, as they are based on the inductive observation of phenomena, not on *a priori* ideals. Newton famously said that anything which does not derive from observations of nature has no place in natural philosophy. He and his fellow new scientists self-consciously defined themselves in opposition to the Aristotelian scholastics, whose claims derived from self-contained logical schemes without sufficient attention to whether or not those schemes corresponded to the behaviour of objects in the actual world. Aristotle himself was not a dogmatic thinker, but based his ideas on observations. By the eighteenth century, however, Aristotelianism had come to imply dogmatism that was opposed to the spirit of Newtonianism. In the Newtonian ideal, truths about nature are to be found in nature itself, not in "sacred texts" written by authorities.

Just as Newton stood in contrast to dogmatic scientists, Shakespeare, in the eyes of his editors, stood in contrast to conventional, formulaic playwrights. His characters corresponded to nature, not to the dictates of dramatic tradition. Pope metaphorically invokes the optical study of images, one of Newton's areas

of interest, to argue for Shakespeare's superiority over poets who simply follow rules and reproduce pre-existing patterns. The characters of those poets, he says, "have a constant resemblance: . . . each picture like a mock-rainbow is but the reflexion of a reflexion," while in Shakespeare, each character "is as much an Individual, as those in Life itself" (1: ii-iii). Johnson contends that while Shakespeare's fellow dramatists created plays in which "probability is violated" and "life is misrepresented," Shakespeare "engaged in dramatick poetry with the world open before him." He "caught his ideas from the living world, and exhibited only what he saw before him" (7: 63-64, 69). In depicting humanity so precisely, Shakespeare's achievement parallels that of the empirical scientist charged with the task of accurately recording the vast variety and fullness of nature. Shakespeare's plays, Johnson says, are "not in the rigorous and critical sense either tragedies or comedies, but compositions of a distinct kind; exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature . . . expressing the course of the world . . . mingled with endless variety of proportion and innumerable modes of combination" (7: 66). Sublunary nature is a pre-Newtonian term, but the ideal of recording reality by going directly to nature, independent of dogma and convention, was at the core of the admiration for Newton. The view of Shakespeare as an "empirical" thinker who follows nature—the supreme and ultimate source of knowledge—instead of rules and tradition gives the editors powerful ammunition for defending him against the charge that he violated the neoclassical rules. Employing an astronomical image, Johnson describes Shakespeare's flaws as a part of his naturalness when he writes that "[h]is

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characters are praised as natural, though their sentiments are sometimes forced, and their actions improbable, as the earth upon the whole is spherical, though its surface is varied with protuberance and cavities" (7: 70-71).

The other editors agree with Johnson that Shakespeare must be judged not by the measure of tradition but through an appreciation of what he discovered about reality, what Johnson calls "an appeal open from criticism to nature" (7: 67). Pope acknowledges that Shakespeare did not know the classical rules and insists that they should not guide the criticism of his writing: "To judge therefore *Shakespear* by *Aristotle*'s rules is like trying a man by the Laws of one Country, who acted under those of another" (1: vi). Warburton, in a similar vein, writes that Shakespeare should be judged "by those only Laws and Principles on which he wrote, Nature, and Common-Sense" (1: xix). The genius who discovers truths about nature cannot be contained within tradition and rules. In "To the Memory of Newton," Thomson observes that the "Triumphs of old *Greece* and *Rome*" are "diminish'd" by those of Newton (31-32). Like Newton, Shakespeare calls for a modified reference frame, and literary criticism, like other branches of eighteenth-century science, must serve the truth about nature by refraining from judging Shakespeare according to learned standards.

Neoclassical criticism focuses on the plot, which should resolve morally, ensuring poetic justice. It also prescribes decorum, prohibiting the mingling of high and low, tragedy and comedy, coarse and noble language. Shakespeare routinely violated these two key requirements—poetic justice and decorum. The editors, however, were able to defend the disturbing aspects of the Shakespearean

canon—for instance, the heartbreaking ending of a play such as *King Lear*, his

mixing of tragedy and comedy, his use of puns and coarse language—on the

grounds that his characters accurately represented the reality of human nature,

regardless of whether or not that reality is morally or aesthetically pleasing. This

nature-based defence was an effective line of argument in the scientifically

inspired culture of eighteenth-century England, a culture more receptive than

most earlier ones to the idea that traditional requirements can and should be

discarded if they interfere with the accurate depiction of nature.

Shakespeare and the General Principles of Human Nature

The editors' assessment of Shakespeare's characters does not stop with the

idea that these characters are a realistic study of human life. The editors credit

Shakespeare with two principles: not only the accurate observation and recording

of reality, but also generalization. Shakespeare is not simply an empirical

recorder of the world who gathers specimens of humanity. His characters also

embody an understanding of the universal principles of human nature. The

editors' second common claim is that Shakespeare's essential achievement is

discovering, through the close study of particulars, the underlying hidden

principles that regulate diversity and explain behaviour, what Theobald calls "the

Dictates of Nature in general" (1: xxxi). This was exactly the achievement that

Newton was praised for: the discovery of general laws through the careful study

of nature. In the scientific culture of the eighteenth century, diversity was not

valued for its own sake. The increasing variety of phenomena discovered through

optical instruments—the microscope, the telescope, the prism—intensified the

search for unifying universal principles (William Powell Jones 87). Newton was not one of many virtuosi who simply documented the endless variety of nature. What made him a hero was his ability to discover the laws that simplified that endless variety. As a result of his discoveries, each detail in nature could be looked at as embodying general universal principles.

Similarly, Shakespeare's characters are particular specimens that embody general truths. The universality of Shakespeare's characters, despite their colourful individuality, is crucial for the editors. Theobald attributes the preservation of Shakespeare's characters to the "grand Touches of Nature" in which he was "most deeply instructed" (1: xx). Johnson commends Shakespeare for his "adherence to general nature . . . over accident." Local habits, he contends, possibly alluding to Newton's study of colour, "are only superficial dies . . . but the discriminations of true passion are the colours of nature." Shakespeare's characters for Johnson are "not modified by the customs of particular places, unpractised by the rest of the world." On the contrary, "they are the genuine progeny of common humanity, such as the world will always supply, and observation will always find." His characters are "natural, and therefore durable," like rocks uninjured by the passage of time. Johnson calls Shakespeare's creations species and not individuals because they "act and speak by the influence of those general passions and principles by which all minds are agitated, and the whole system of life is continued in motion." Shakespeare paints "scenes from which a hermit may estimate the transactions of the world, and a confessor predict the progress of the passions." He "makes nature

predominate over accident" and ultimately "preserves the essential character" of humanity, rather than particular variations (7: 62, 65, 70). Pope contends that Shakespeare "hits" in his characterization "upon that particular point on which the bent of each argument turns, or the force of each motive depends" (1: iv). Force, system, motion, general principles, the prediction of behavior—these terms resonate with the language and spirit of Newtonian mechanics.

The editors' language is rich with images and patterns of thinking that would be familiar not only conceptually, but also visually, to people in the Newtonian age. One of the important aspects of the scientific culture of eighteenth-century England were the highly popular public demonstrations of Newton's principles, using a variety of instruments. A record of Newtonian public demonstrations is extant at the King George III collection of the London Science Museum. The Grand Orrery by Thomas Wright (Figure 1) is a miniature of the Newtonian universe that illustrates how the system of the planets is kept in motion by the force of gravity. Orreries were dearly loved objects in the eighteenth century and were often invoked metaphorically to prescribe an ideal for the order of British society. The compound engine, which is an instrument based on a wheel (Figure 2), was used to demonstrate the operation of Newton's laws of motion in the terrestrial sphere. By figuring Shakespeare's knowledge of humanity with images that register Newtonian mechanics—forces, wheels, systems that are kept in motion—the editors help to confer the authority of discovery on him. They employ words associated with Newtonian teaching

Figure 1: Grand Orrery by Thomas Wright
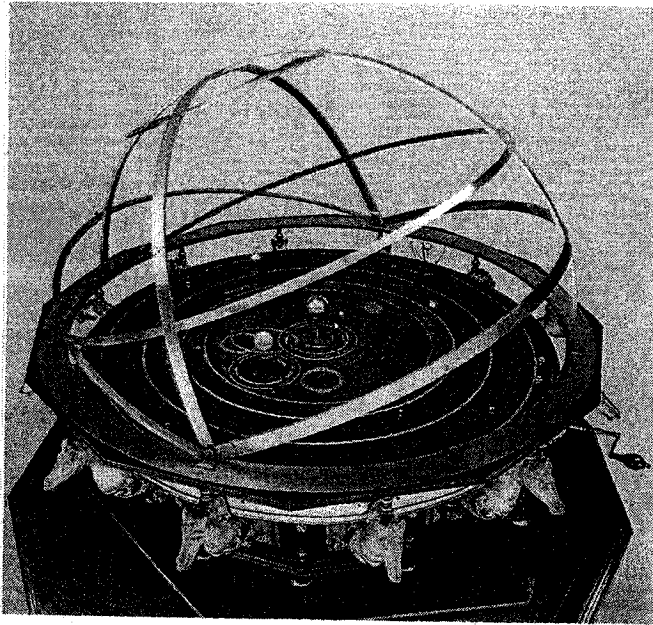
(London Science Museum)

instruments to advance a view of Shakespearean character as an instrument for the

teaching of human nature. These connotations give special cultural depth to

Pope's claim that Shakespeare was an "instrument of nature" (1: ii). Like a

Newtonian teaching machine, his characters demonstrate, not merely describe, the

operations of human nature. They are particular demonstrations of universal

principles.

Both Shakespeare and Newton were promoted as teachers of truths about

nature. As Larry Stewart shows in *The Rise of Public Science*, the public

demonstrations of Newton's laws were crucial in supporting the claims of

Newtonians "to improve the world through knowledge of the principles of nature"

(118). Newton was presented to the public as a discoverer of knowledge that is

Figure 2: An eighteenth-century compound engine
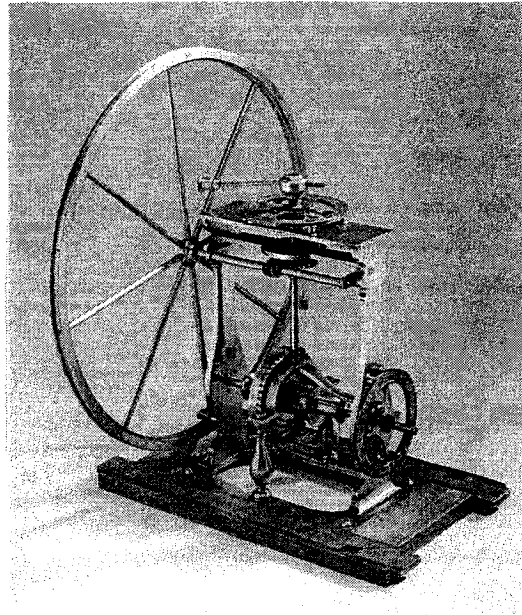
(London Science Museum)

useful not only practically, but also morally. Steven Shapin explains that in the

culture of the eighteenth century "a natural order bearing the sure evidence of

divine creation and superintendence was understood to uplift those who dedicated

themselves to its study" (164). Similarly, the discovery of order in the human

world was understood to be important for the moral and practical improvement of

humanity. Shakespeare did not conform to the laws of poetic justice, but his

writings embodied an understanding of the underlying laws of human nature, and

were therefore both practically and morally useful.

In their Prefaces, the editors speak about Shakespeare's discovery of

universal principles in very general, idealistic terms, without stating what these

principles are. This lack of specificity draws attention to an important distinction

between the meaning of "general laws" in the Shakespearian and Newtonian

context. When the editors speak of "general laws," they do not have in mind a simple set of "equations" which explain the behaviour of all of Shakespeare's characters, in the same way that Newton's laws explain the motion of all material objects. What they mean when they say that Shakespeare's characters embody the general, universal laws of human nature is that the behaviour of these characters is not random, nor is it dictated by local habits, tradition or dramatic convention. Rather, it is explained by underlying principles that Shakespeare discovered by observing the human realm and that can in turn be applied to the study of human behaviour in the real world. These principles cannot be reduced to three, four or five "laws of human nature." Rather, each character needs to be examined closely to identify the principle that explains its behaviour. This is something that the editors do only in their annotations of the plays. In the Prefaces, their focus is on making the general and important point that Shakespeare's characters are not simply randomly collected specimens, but are knowledge-based creations that can function as instruments for teaching readers about the principles that govern human behaviour in its myriad manifestations. As such, one may look upon Shakespeare's characters much as one looks upon natural phenomena in the Newtonian universe: as entities subject to the kind of analysis which makes reality coherent and explains behaviour by identifying underlying principles. Once these underlying principles are detected, confusion turns into clarity.

The editors' understanding of Shakespeare's characters in terms of general principles embodied in particular detail does not coherently fit into a neoclassical

model, as has been sometimes suggested, but only into a Newtonian one. In *Samuel Johnson and Neoclassic Dramatic Theory*, R.D. Stock asks: "To what degree is Johnson a traditional neo-classicist who admires Shakespeare for his imitation of the general and universal; or to what extent has he been influenced by newer critical trends to prefer particular and common men?" (48). While Stock's question is useful, his reference frame is not sufficiently broad to answer it. From a Newtonian perspective, there is no tension between universals and particulars: Newton fulfilled the long-standing search for universal principles through the new empirical spirit. He shared the classical interest in universals, but insisted that universal principles can only be known through the inductive study of particulars. Newton admired, and advanced, Aristotle's attempt to systematize knowledge, but did not tolerate discrepancies between the classical scheme and observed facts. Like Shakespeare, Newton was not an abstract rationalist. In Newton's methodology, particular detail and universal synthesis are equally important for knowledge, just as they are for Shakespeare as the editors imagine him—as an investigator of human nature. This, for the editors, is precisely Shakespeare's contribution to advancing the study of humanity: that he discovered universal knowledge by engaging in particular detail.

<u>The Prefaces and the Seventeenth-Century Folios</u>

In itself, the idea that dramatic character embodies truths about human nature is not necessarily scientifically inspired. This mimetic view of literature, the idea that it reflects truths about reality, was not new to the eighteenth-century Prefaces, but harks back to classical times. Shakespeare himself echoes that view

when he puts in Hamlet's mouth the words that the aim of playing is "to hold . . . the mirror up to nature" (3.2.20-21). The seventeenth-century Folios praise Shakespeare's poetry as precisely such a mirror when they call Shakespeare "a happy imitator of nature" (n. pag.). There is indeed a continuity of ideas between the Folios and the eighteenth-century prefatory materials. Like the Prefaces, the Folios glow with admiration for Shakespeare's intellect. It is not surprising, then, that the eighteenth-century editors routinely appended the Folios' prefatory materials to their editions to bolster their own descriptions of Shakespeare. However, there are also important differences between the eighteenth-century view of Shakespeare and that of the Folio compilers. In the Folios, nature generally means natural gift; appeals to nature tend to refer to the fluent outpouring of Shakespeare's talent through language. The eighteenth-century Prefaces, in contrast, focus on Shakespeare's ability to understand the general principles of nature. The Folios do not have the same emphasis on generality, and do not distinguish between particular nature and general nature. They do not embody a Newtonian-informed understanding of how knowledge about nature is to be obtained—through the synthesis of particular observations into universal principles.

In the poem "To the memory of my beloved, the author Mr. William Shakespeare" affixed to the Folio, Ben Jonson depicts nature as a collaborator in Shakespeare's imaginative project when he writes that "Nature her selfe was proud of [Shakespeare's] designes/And joy'd to weare the dressing of his lines." The Prefaces embody a different view of the relationship between nature and

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creative art. People living in the Newtonian age believed that they were looking at reality in a mirror made more precise by scientific discovery, a mirror hardened and polished by Newton. In the prefatory poem by Henry Pemberton appended to *A View of Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophy*, the coursebook to which Theobald subscribed, the author praises Newton for refining "that mirror, in whose polish'd face/The great creator now conspicuous shines" (7-8). The mirror that Shakespeare holds up to nature is, for the editors, precisely such a scientifically modified mirror. In the eighteenth century, Shakespeare is no longer seen simply as an artist who has the power to draw nature into his craft as a playful, flexible collaborator. Nature assumes the superior status of an objective entity from which scientific truth derives, and Shakespeare has correspondingly metamorphosed from a theatrical artist of words into an investigator who serves nature—rather than is served by nature—by creating characters that embody universal truths. It is for this reason that Pope calls Shakespeare "an Instrument of Nature" and says that "She speaks thro' him" (1: ii)

Another, related contrast between the Folios and the Prefaces is in their attitudes towards the theatre. Heminge and Condell were players. Unsurprisingly, they think about Shakespeare within a theatrical context and admire his stagecraft. From the Folio prefatory materials, Shakespeare emerges as a vivid theatrical personality whose genius is tied to his career on the stage. In their Dedicatory Epistle, Heminge and Condell remind their readers that his plays were "acted . . . before they were published," a fact which does not grieve them as it does the eighteenth-century editors. Jonson calls Shakespeare "the wonder

of our Stage" and longs for him to return and cheer the theatre which has been "drooping" since his death. Hugh Holland identifies the Globe theatre with the world when he remembers Shakespeare as the person who "made the Globe of heav'n and earth to ring." The eighteenth-century Prefaces, on the other hand, scorn the Elizabethan theatre. They call Shakespeare a Poet and believe that the theatre deformed his language. Pope blames the low parts of Shakespeare's style on the fact that his "Audience was . . . composed of the meaner sort of people; and therefore the Images of Life were to be drawn from those of their own rank." He says that "Players are just such judges of what is *right*, as Taylors are of what is *graceful*," and therefore "most of our Author's faults are less to be ascribed to his wrong judgment as a Poet, than to his right judgment as a Player." Pope also blames the theatre for the textual problems in the Shakespearean canon when he says that the "innumerable Errors . . . have risen from one source, the ignorance of the Players, both as his actors, and as his editors" (1: v, vii-viii, xiv). Hanmer joins the chorus by blaming Shakespeare's faults on the "rude" and unpolished" theatre to which he catered (1: iv). Warburton writes that Shakespeare's works "left to the Care of Door-keepers and Prompters, hardly escaped the common Fate of those Writings, how good soever, which are abandoned to their own Fortune." He defines the aim of the editorial project as the purification of Shakespeare from the "stubborn Nonsense, with which he was incrusted, occasioned [by] his lying long neglected amongst the common Lumber of the Stage" (1: vii-viii).

Both the Folio writers and the editors, then, see themselves as charged with the preservation of Shakespeare in the printed book. They have significantly

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different notions, however, about what it is that they are preserving. In the Folios,

the idea of honouring Shakespeare with lasting fame invokes an intimate, familiar

and nostalgic image of the playwright as an admired theatrical colleague who

deserves loving commemoration. Shakespeare is praised for personal qualities—

industry, friendliness, generosity. Heminge and Condell want to print his plays in

order to "keep the memory of [a] worthy friend, and Fellow alive." Their edition,

as S. Schoenbaum notes, is a "labour of love" (14). L. Digges hopes that every

line in the book will make Shakespeare "live eternally," just as he lived on the

stage. Ben Jonson similarly writes that Shakespeare is "alive still, while [his]

Booke doth live." The book, he hopes, will bring light to the stage that has been

dejected since Shakespeare's death. Simon Jarvis notes that the Folios "lacked

the obtrusive evidence of editorial labour" which characterized the eighteenth-

century editions (43). This is largely because their compilers believed that their

role was to preserve Shakespeare as he emerged from the theatre, not to improve

him. While the Folio writers suggest harmonious, life-like continuity between the

stage and the page, the editors are bothered by the fact that Shakespeare was a

man of the theatre who wrote scripts for stage production instead of books

carefully edited for publication. The theatre or the texts issuing from it cannot do

justice to the knowledge that Shakespeare discovered. It was therefore an urgent

project to prepare a well-edited book that presents his genius to the public in a

purer form. Newton's analysis of light was to play an important imaginative role

in how the editors figured their own attempts to illuminate Shakespeare in a true

light.

Editorial Prismatics: The Search for Truth and the Hermeneutics of Editing

The closeness of Shakespeare's editors to the popular scientific culture of their day helps to explain not only their view of Shakespeare as a discoverer of universal principles, but also the emphasis on truth and method in their discussions of their own work. The editors invoked the search for truth both in fashioning the image of Shakespeare and in fashioning their own self image. The editors are possessed with a sense of urgency in relation to Shakespeare because they are aware not only of a fundamental similarity, but also of a fundamental difference, between the Renaissance playwright and the Enlightenment scientist: while both Shakespeare and Newton were rare natural geniuses who understood important principles of nature, Shakespeare's discoveries, unlike those of Newton, were not the products of an intentional, well-designed, systematic investigation. Rather, he was led to great truths relatively effortlessly through the powers of insight and observation with which he had been naturally blessed, a route which negatively affected his articulation of what he discovered. Johnson emphasizes that Shakespeare's works were "not raised upon principles demonstrative and scientifick," but were based on a less deliberate and organized kind of information gathering (7: 65). Shakespeare had intuitive access to the laws of human nature, but his carelessness often implies that his discoveries are in need of better presentation. The relevance of the knowledge that is veiled in Shakespeare to the enlightenment truth-seeking project energized the editorial preoccupation with emending and improving Shakespeare. The editors sought to make available to

their readers a body of supremely valuable truths by freeing them from the obscurity and corruption of pre-Enlightenment practices. Shakespeare, for them, was a confusing body of theatrical practices that could be refined into a corpus of knowledge about human nature by following the correct method.

Conceptually, the editors approach Shakespeare as the scientist approaches the natural world: with an urge to find order through method. Shakespeare, clearly, is not simply a brilliant investigator. He is a curiously paradoxical figure: a genius who discovers truths about (human) nature, and at the same time, figuratively speaking, nature itself—a site of heterogeneity and confusion where the editor must sort through diverse phenomena to discover hidden order. For Johnson, while "the work of a correct and regular writer is a garden accurately formed and diligently planted . . . the composition of Shakespeare is a forest, in which oaks extend their branches, and pines tower in the air, interspersed sometimes with weeds and brambles, and sometimes giving shelter to myrtles and roses; filling the eye with awful pomp, and gratifying the mind with endless diversity" (7: 84). Theobald writes that there is no "author more various from himself" than Shakespeare, whom he likens to a powerful natural force: "His fire, Spirit, and Exuberance of Imagination gave an Impetuosity to his Pen: His Ideas flow'd from him in a Stream rapid" (1: xv-xvi).

The metaphoric idea of Shakespeare as nature was instrumental in conferring the status of science on editing. The editors see themselves as charged with the task of re-conceptualizing and re-shaping Shakespeare, separating his good parts from his bad and presenting him to the reading public in an accurate

light. It is for this reason that I call the editors the "Newtons of Shakespeare." In a 1739-40 letter to Pope, Henry Brooke praises Warburton's editing of Pope's poetry in Newtonian terms: after reading Warburton's explanations, he tells Pope, "your system appears so connected and evident, as by no means to want an explanation." Pope's poetry, for Brooke, reflects nature accurately: "[t]he world could not make your poem any other than it is in itself," and Warburton, Brooke tells Pope, is "the Newton of your system . . . assisting [the readers'] sight" (*Pope's Correspondence* 213). Shakespeare editing, of course, is not the subject of this letter. Nonetheless, the conception of the editor as a Newton of a work of literature who makes it comprehensible to the readers (in the same way that Newton made nature comprehensible to his fellow human beings) aptly describes the editors' conception of their role in relation to Shakespeare.

The editors often use scientifically inspired imagery to describe their work. In the beginning of his Preface, Theobald writes that

The attempt to write upon Shakespeare is like going into a large, a

spacious, and a splendid Dome thro' the Conveyance of a narrow and

obscure Entry. A Glare of Light suddenly breaks upon you, beyond what

the Avenue at first promis'd: and a thousand Beauties of Genius and

Character, like so many gaudy Apartments pouring at once upon the Eye,

diffuse and throw themselves out to the Mind. The Prospect is too wide to

come within the Compass of a single View: 'tis a gay Confusion of

pleasing Objects, too various to be enjoyed but in a general Admiration;

and they must be separated, and ey'd distinctly, in order to give the proper

Entertainment. (1: i)

The figurative light that the Shakespearean text exudes is necessarily an

ambiguous one because while it contains the pure essence of Shakespeare's

genius, it is also a mixture of confusing elements, some good and others bad. By

figuring Shakespeare as light and the editorial task as the separation of light,

Theobald advances an image of editorial work that resonates with the cultural

power of Newtonian optical discovery.

The *Opticks*, Newton's first book to be written in English, and a work

dealing with light and colour rather than with the less tangible subject of

gravitation, was more accessible, and consequently more immediately popular,

than the *Principia*, which was not only more abstract than the *Opticks*, but also

written in Latin. Between 1704 and 1730, the *Opticks* went through five editions

(Hall 181, 237). It fulfilled a long-standing search to understand light. One of the

reasons that light had not been studied scientifically was that it was associated

with the divine. Milton was interested in science, but tended to represent light as

an end in itself. In *Paradise Lost*, God is present in light, and light is therefore

inaccessible to rational analysis. Newton, like Milton, was a devout Christian,

and was reluctant to separate any natural phenomenon from the divine. He did,

nevertheless, make a crucial contribution to the study of light as a physical

phenomenon. "My design in this Book," Newton explains in the beginning of the

Opticks, "is not to explain the Properties of Light by Hypotheses, but to propose

and prove them by Reason and Experiments." Newton discovered that "the Light

of the Sun consists of Rays differently Refrangible," and hence produces different colours (1, 18). When passing through a prism, light is refracted into various colours, which can then be united back into white light in another prism. Betty Dobbs and Margaret Jacob describe what came to be known as Newton's crucial prismatic experiment:

> If the ray of light passes into the glass at an oblique angle, it is split into all the colours of the rainbow, because each colour acts as an independent ray and has its own precise and specific angle of changed direction. An oblong rainbow of separate colours thus becomes visible as the rays leave the prism. The coloured rays kept their unique angles of refraction when passed through a second prism, Newton demonstrated, and they also could be recombined to constitute white light. So, Newton argued, the colored rays are the fundamental individuals, and white light is a confused mixture of them. (20)

Thanks to Newton, light, while still representing the power and mystery of God, also, for the first time, became subject to analysis, and hence to closer, more precise description and understanding. The Newtonian understanding of light, as Marjorie Hope Nicolson demonstrates in *Newton Demands the Muse*, excited the literary imagination. Newtonian light, she observes, was "everywhere in the poetry of the second quarter century" (37). The century's poetry is rich in appreciative descriptions of the spectrum of colours revealed in the prism, often referred to as "Newton's rainbow." In "To the Memory of Sir Isaac Newton," for

instance, James Thomson figures light as a shining fabric made of different

strings which Newton "untwists" for the benefit of his admiring viewers:

> Even *Light Itself*, which every thing displays,
>
> Shone undiscover'd, till his brighter Mind
>
> Untwisted all the shining Robe of Day;
>
> And from the whitening, undistinguish'd Blaze,
>
> Collecting every Ray into his Kind,
>
> To the charm'd Eye educ'd the gorgeous Train
>
> Of *Parent-Colours*. (98-104)

Newtonian white light—divine, confusing and awe inspiring, but also subject to

analysis—emerges as an imaginative "model" for Shakespearean light as treated

by the editorial eye. The physiological precision with which Theobald describes

the "thousand Beauties of Genius and Character" that "pour" from the

Shakespearean page "upon the Eye" and "diffuse and throw themselves out to the

Mind" in the above-quoted passage demonstrates his familiarity with eighteenth-

century empirical psychology, which explained perception physically using

concepts adapted from Newton's optics. His description of the gaudy glare of

light resembles Johnson's figuring of Shakespeare as "awful pomp" that

overwhelms the eye. Like Newtonian white light, Shakespearean diversity can be

comprehended only through analysis that seeks to identify underlying principles

that can be "ey'd distinctly." Identifying those principles is the editor's job.

In itself, light is not a novel image, but a very common one throughout the

history of literature. The light that Theobald describes, however, is a Newtonian

light—light subject to analysis. Metaphorically, the editorial eye as Theobald imagines it functions like a Newtonian prism: a powerful instrument of discovery that separates the subject of study into analyzable elements. Even though Theobald's invocation of Newton's *Opticks* is indirect and clearly metaphoric, this scientifically inspired description is significant because of the mentality that it represents. It reflects a view of editing as a systematic undertaking whose goal is the discovery of truth. That was a view shared by the other eighteenth-century editors. Hanmer, for instance, writes that with the proper editorial treatment, the "rich vein of sense which runs through the works of [Shakespeare] can be retrieved . . . and brought to appear in its true light" (1: v). The editors were all engaged in the attempt to recover the hidden vein of Shakespearean truth. The next section, however, will explore, through the example of Pope and Theobald, one of the strange and fascinating aspects of eighteenth-century editing: that the common editorial vision about the importance of finding truth in Shakespeare was often interpreted in radically different ways when it came to editorial method.

Pope's Poet's Ear, Theobald's Logic: Two Instruments of Truth

In the history of Shakespeare editing, Pope and Theobald are remembered as fierce opponents. Their antagonism, which culminated in Pope's attack on Theobald's pedantry and dullness in the *Dunciad*, developed because they had mutually incompatible approaches to editing. This, at least, is the received view of the relationship between them. The focus on science, however, shows that, on a basic conceptual level, their approach to editing had a great deal in common, despite their differences.

The differences between Pope and Theobald's approaches to Shakespeare cannot be minimized. In several important respects, they are indeed far apart. For Pope, as numerous critics have noted, editing was largely an imaginative, creative activity designed to improve Shakespeare. Pope used his poet's ear and aesthetic intuition to restore Shakespeare to what to him was a pleasing literary state, what he believed Shakespeare would have written had he worked during the Enlightenment instead of in the sadly primitive theatrical milieu of his age. Following his taste as a guiding instrument, Pope deleted over 1500 lines from the canon and altered thousands of words (Mack 420). He corrected what he viewed as coarseness and excess and eliminated many of Shakespeare's puns. He replaced Shakespeare's phrases with his own creations and systematically regulated his disorderly rhyme, often changing prose into verse and altering punctuation. Pope conducted relatively little research in preparation for the editorial undertaking and wrote only scant commentary. The most memorable aspect of his six volumes is the bold method of relegating "bad" passages to the bottom of the page, routinely labelling them as "trash," and at the same time distinguishing "shining passages" with a comma in the margin, and prefixing a star to particularly beautiful scenes. Pope did make a number of significant editorial contributions. For instance, he collected and collated quartos and recovered some lines and scenes from them. He divided the plays into scenes and established locations for the action. All in all, however, his editing was unsystematic.

Theobald, a diligent scholar of Elizabethan literature, was appalled by Pope's practices. Theobald publicly entered the Shakespearean editorial scene in 1726, a year after the publication of Pope's edition, with *Shakespeare Restored: or, A specimen of the many errors, as well committed, as unamended, by Mr. Pope in his late edition of this poet*. The title speaks for itself: Theobald viewed Pope as an incompetent and inconsistent editor whose superficial knowledge of Shakespeare and of Renaissance culture and language —indeed, his lack of interest in these subjects—led him into repeated error. In the Preface to his own edition, published eight years later, Theobald defines himself in opposition to Pope by establishing systematic editorial procedures. He writes that "the Science of Criticism, as far as it affects an Editor" amounts to three activities: "the Emendation of corrupt Passages; the Explanation of obscure and difficult ones; and an Inquiry into the Beauties and Defects of Composition" (1: xl). All three require thorough knowledge of both the text and the historical context in which it was produced, subjects to which Theobald dedicated many years of study.

Theobald founded his editing of Shakespeare on the principle of consistency. Whenever he encountered an obscure expression, his first step was to look for how that expression might be used in Shakespeare's other plays, and then in the literature of his Elizabethan contemporaries in order to understand its meaning—a method which was known as reasoning from parallel readings. The absence of such a procedure was Theobald's chief complaint against Pope because it resulted in an erratic editorial apparatus. For example, when Pope edits Othello's speech at the senate, he delegates the lines in which Othello tells of "the

men whose heads . . . grow beneath their shoulders" to the bottom of the page because they seem incredible (6: 491). But why then, Theobald asks, did Pope preserve similar lines from *The Tempest*: "Who would believe, / . . . ./that there were such Men,/Whose Heads stood in their Breasts?" (7: 391). Indeed, with respect to consistency, Pope's editing fails.

Theobald, while he did correct the obscure aspects of the text which resulted from early-modern writing practices (such as spelling and punctuation), otherwise aimed to recover what Shakespeare wrote, not to "make [Shakespeare] speak better" than he does in the surviving texts. He promises the readers that "[n]othing is alter'd" in his edition "but what by the clearest Reasoning can be proved a Corruption of the true Text; and the Alteration, a real Restoration of the genuine Reading." He also commits himself to emendations founded on his knowledge of the Shakespearean canon, knowledge which he aspires to make as broad and complete as possible: "whenever I have taken a greater Latitude and Liberty in amending, I have constantly endeavoured to support my Corrections and Conjectures by parallel Passages and Authorities from himself" (1: xl, xliii).

When a word or a sentence seems to Theobald to be an error in printing or transmission, he follows careful logic- and research-based procedures to try to recover what Shakespeare wrote. The best-known instance of Theobald's emendatory power is in Mistress Quickly's description of Falstaff's death in *Henry V* 2.3.17. The Folio enigmatically reads, "his Nose was as sharpe as a Pen, and a Table of greene fields" (75). Pope imaginatively suggests that the line be understood as a stage direction: "a table was here directed to be brought in (it

being a tavern scene where they drink at parting), and this direction crept into the text from the margin. Greenfield was the name of the property man" (3: 422). The learned Theobald, on the other hand, approached the obscure expression historically. He consulted an edition of Shakespeare "with some Marginal Conjectures of a Gentleman sometime deceas'd" who suggested the emendation "his Nose was as sharp as a Pen, and 'a talked of green Fields." Theobald is attracted to the conjecture because of the sense that it restores to the passage: "it has certainly been observed of People near Death, when they are delirious by a Fever, that they talk of *removing*; as it has of Those in a Calenture, that they have their Heads run on *green Fields*." Calenture, recognized during Shakespeare's time, was a tropical disease of sailors, whose delirium led them to believe that the sea was green fields and made them desire to jump into it. Theobald, however, is not comfortable with changing "Table" to "talk'd," which he considers a change "of a very great Latitude." He proposes instead "and 'a babled of green fields," namely spoke incoherently in a state of illness. He points out that 'a' was an abbreviation for "he" in Shakespeare's time, and also supports the emendation with handwriting analysis (4: 30-31). Today, Theobald's emendation is still accepted. It has been suggested that it enriches our understanding of the text by making the description of the death, as Shakespeare quite possibly intended, resonate with *Psalm* 23:2: "He makes me lie down in green pastures."

Both Pope and Theobald, then, introduce emendations into the text, but their respective methods for doing so seem like opposites: the one analytic and guided by the systematic examination of evidence; the other impulsive and guided

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by intuition and taste. Theobald emends when the surviving text does not make sense; Pope, when it conflicts with his aesthetic sensibilities. Visually, the difference between the two editions is striking. Theobald's page looks much like a present-day scholarly edition. It is rich with historical information and filled with notes, some several-pages long, carefully outlining the editor's reasoning. Pope's page, by contrast, is stark. There are very few notes, and the notorious emendations are for the most part executed silently without any explanation or a trace of the original, thus boldly asserting the editor's authority as an arbiter of Shakespearean truth. How are these polar differences to be understood in light of the fact that the two editors shared a set of similar ideas about Shakespeare as a discoverer of truth and about editing as a knowledge-seeking endeavour?

Theobald's analytical approach is easy to reconcile with scientific influences. It has long been recognized that his method is indebted to Richard Bentley, the editor of Horace (1711), Terence (1726) and Maniluis (1739). "Never," Richard Foster Jones contends, "have the pursuits of scholars been so dominated by a single influence as those of the eighteenth century were dominated by Bentley" (32). What is less well known among literary scholars is that Bentley was not only editor, but also one of the most prolific popularizers of Newton. When Robert Boyle died in 1691, he left an endowment for eight annual lectures that were to use Newtonian science against atheism. In 1692, Bentley preached a successful series of Newtonian-inspired sermons in London churches that were then circulated in print, helping to increase Newton's popularity in England. Bentley's status as both a Newtonian and an editor is indicative of the

closeness between the literary world and the world of the natural sciences in the eighteenth century.

The hermeneutical method that Bentley and Theobald practiced, using logic and appealing to consistency within the corpus as the basis for editorial decisions, recalls the empirical requirement that any claim in natural philosophy must derive from a systematic examination of the phenomena found in nature.[2] Newton himself perceived an analogy between the methods that guide natural philosophy and textual work (which in his case was Biblical work). In *The Language of the Prophets*, Newton argues that textual hermeneutics should be guided "by the analogy between the world natural and the world politic." In his work with the Hebrew text, he prescribes an approach based on consistency: "The Rule I have followed has been to compare the several mystical places of scripture where the same prophetic phrase or type is used, and to fix such a signification to that phrase as agrees best with all the places" (*Theological Manuscripts* 120). This is a method which Newton shared with Theobald, Bentley and others. The text in this hermeneutical model is treated, by way of analogy, as the book of nature: a site of diversity and confusion where order and meaning can nevertheless be found by following a careful method based on the thorough and minute investigation of details.

When viewed in opposition to Bentley and Theobald, both of whom he mocks in the *Dunciad* for their pedantry, Pope appears to be a careless investigator of Shakespearean "nature," an editor concerned more with his own ideas than with the reality of the text. Why, then, does Pope employ the language

of objectivity and methodological rigor to describe his textual practices when he tells his readers that he has performed his editorial duties "with a religious abhorrence of all Innovation, and without any indulgence to [his] private sense or conjecture" and promises that "the method taken in this Edition will show itself?" (1: xxii-xxiii). In view of Pope's heavy reliance on taste and his unsystematic practices, this rhetoric of impartiality appears strange indeed. However, this is not simply a case of a gap between prefatory self-theorizing and reality. While there is no denying that such a gap indeed plagues his works, even Pope's practices are influenced by science.

The language that Pope employs reflects his view of taste as a truth-revealing mechanism. Pope's editorial practices may seem hard to reconcile with the scientific search for truth because they are founded on taste, a subjective term in today's conceptual universe. Eighteenth-century culture, however, did not oppose taste to objective truth to the extent that we do today, and the scientific sprit of the period involved a quest to define aesthetic value objectively. Joseph Addison, for instance, believed that it was possible to develop universal, agreed-upon rules of taste. David Hume, in "Of the Standard of Taste," acknowledges that aesthetic judgments are motivated by individual preferences, but at the same time argues for the possibility of a disinterested "true standard of taste and sentiment" to guide criticism (215). Taste was often invoked as a guide to truth in the literature of the period. In his proposal for publishing *A View of Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophy*, Henry Pemberton invites "every Gentleman who has a moderate Degree of Literature or Politeness" to gain with his book's help "a

comprehensive view of the stupendous Frame of Nature, and the Structure of the Universe, with the same ease that he now acquires a Taste of the Magnificence of a Plan of Architecture, or the Elegance of a beautiful Plantation" (McKillop 12). Pope has a similar view of taste as an instrument of discovery. Beauty is for him linked with truth, and taste possesses the universal springs of knowledge, not merely of opinion.

Pope's attitude to the editing of Shakespeare is consistent with ideas about the affinity between taste and truth that he expresses in his poetry. In An *Essay on Criticism*, Pope instructs critics to employ nature as their guide: "First follow Nature, and your Judgment frame/By her just Standard, which is still the same:/ *Unerring Nature*, still divinely bright . . ." (1: 68-70). Adherence to nature, however, does not require dryness of style. On the contrary, it inspires good taste and wit: "*True wit* is *Nature* to Advantage drest,/What oft was *Thought*, but ne'er so well *Exprest*" (1: 297-8). The identification of wit with truth about nature indicates that Pope's attacks on dullness and pedantry are not attacks against the fundamental drive behind science: the drive to discover the order and regularity of nature. In the *Dunciad*, in fact, dullness is an enemy of knowledge, not merely of wit: "Beneath her foot-stool, *Science* groans in Chains,/And *Wit* dreads Exile, Penalties and Pains" (5: 21-22). Despite their vast differences and mutual animosity, Pope and Theobald both look for regularity within the text. Their "instruments," however, are different: the one relying on his taste and poetic ear, the other on the operations of reason, logic and research. While Theobald's approach emulates the systematic empirical investigation of nature, Pope's

approach relies on a belief in the possibility of special insight into a truth hidden in nature, in this case Shakespearean nature, that can be recovered by a person with special talent. In their own ways, they each see themselves as a "Newton of Shakespeare," but while the one speaks with the authority of the "inductive scientist," carefully assembling Shakespeare's truth from minute details, the other speaks with the authority of a natural genius possessing direct insight into the truth.

Newton, indeed, was admired not only for his systematic method, but also for his special connection to nature and for his ability, at crucial moments of discovery, to gain direct insight into the truth. In a 1692 letter to Bentley, Newton claims that the "service" that his discoveries have done to the "public" is "due to nothing but industry and patient thought" (*Works of Bentley* 3. 203). Newton's eighteenth-century admirers recognized the incompleteness of that account. Industry and patient thought are qualities that Newton shared with countless other scholars, and they alone cannot explain his achievement. With this in mind, the poetry of praise of Newton tended to emphasize not only his analytical mind, but also his ability to connect with the truth directly, through God-given intuition. Many of these poems describe Newton in language that today would be associated more closely with artistic creation than with scientific investigation: soaring inspiration, enlarged faculties, the ability to fly and transcend reality. Jane Brereton, for instance, depicts Newton in as an inspired thinker who "Sublimely, on the Wings of Knowledge, soars" to discover "th' establish'd Order" of nature (38-39), while James Thomson describes him in "A Poem Sacred to the Memory

of Sir Isaac Newton" as voyaging "to mingle with his Stars," where he wanders

"in Rapture lost," gathering knowledge (1, 15).

In the same way that Newton had a special connection with nature, a

connection just as important for the modification of natural philosophy as his

systematic method, Pope believed that his own poetic talent afforded him

privileged access to the hidden truth of Shakespeare. Maynard Mack is correct in

his assessment that Pope's edition "is far more the result of overconfidence than

of sloth" (426). More than any other editor, Pope has confidence in himself as

the "Newton of Shakespeare." In "An Essay on Criticism," Pope describes not

only poets, but also critics, as possessing a special gift from nature:

In *Poets* as true *Genius* is but rare,

True *Taste* as seldom is the *Critick's* Share;

Both must alike from Heav'n derive their Light,

These *born* to Judge, as well as those to Write. (1: 11-14)

The Tonsons chose Pope to edit Shakespeare because of his poetic reputation.

With the exception of Theobald, early eighteenth-century editors respected Pope

as a genius who had a privileged understanding of Shakespeare. Pope, Warburton

writes, worked "by the mere force of an uncommon Genius" to uncover a truth

about Shakespeare that can serve as a foundation for future editions. "It hath been

no unusual thing," Warburton contends, "for Writers, when dissatisfied with the

Patronage or Judgment of their own Times, to appeal to Posterity for a fair

Hearing," and it was Pope who answered the call and re-wrote Shakespeare to

free him from the corruption of the theatre (1: ix, A4).

Pope's conviction that he had a special, poetically inspired insight into the truth of Shakespeare does not exonerate him from the charge of sloppy, subjective editing. However, the rhetoric of truth and objectivity that he employs is not a case of deception. It reflects methodological self-consciousness that regards taste as a truth-revealing faculty and that links Pope's understanding of editing to the scientific discourses of his age. Pope intends the term "show itself" seriously. He uses the apparatus of the printed text as a visual device to represent his understanding about the relative status of different Shakespearean passages. His method of relegating and starring passages is imaginatively "prismatic." Like Newton's prismatic experiment, Pope's edition privileges separation as an instrument of understanding. The bad aspects of the text are not banished from sight, but are displayed on the page. What emerges is a prismatic display of the different elements of Shakespeare as evaluated by the editor. Ironically, Pope's notorious practice visually "enacts" Theobald's metaphor of separating the confusing light of Shakespeare into distinct elements. Pope, however, ultimately valued unity more than separation, and his "prismatic" analysis of the text is done in order to restore it to a state of purity that would reflect Shakespeare's true genius. In *An Essay on Criticism* Pope presents a negative image of prismatic diversity, comparing false eloquence to it, and contrasting it with the unity of the sun:

> *False Eloquence*, like the *Prismatic Glass*,
>
> Its gawdy colours spread on *ev'ry place*;
>
> The Face of Nature we no more Survey,

>All glares *alike*, without *Distinction* gay:
>
>But true *Expression*, like th' unchanging *Sun*
>
>Clears, and *improves* whate'er it shines upon,
>
>It *gilds* all Objects, but it *alters* none. (1: 311-17)

Here, prismatic separation is a source of confusion, rather than its remedy, indicating an ultimate privileging of the unity associated with white light and true expression. Newton used a prism not only to separate light into its colours, but also to unify the colours back into white light. Pope is interested in separation and analysis only to the extent that they reveal the essence of Shakespeare's genius. He views Shakespeare much as Samuel Boyse, one of the scientific poets of the period, describes the sun in "Triumphs of Nature" (1742):

>As darts the Sun oblique his varied rays,
>
>When through the fleecy cloud his lustre plays,
>
>Here deepens to a gloom the varied green,
>
>There beams a light—and shifts the shadowy scene:
>
>But when the obvious vapour melts away,
>
>The boundless prospect brightens into day. (Boyse 536)

As in a theatrical performance, Boyse's sun moves through diverse scenes, but ultimately "when the obvious vapour melts away," its pure essence emerges. "Obvious" dismisses what interferes with the pure light of the sun as non-essential. Similarly, Pope viewed the theatre as non-essential to Shakespeare genius. He was confident in his ability to melt the vapour that the theatre created around Shakespeare so that his genius would shine through.

There is a connection between the freedom that Pope feels to amend the text and the empirical discourse of language, developed by Locke and others, in which words are not inherent in things, but must be adjusted to describe the truth. The new science was founded on the idea, expressed for instance in Galileo's "Letters on Sunspots," that "names and attributes must be accommodated to the essence of things, and not the essence of things to the names" (92). The motto of the Royal Society, "bound to the word of no one," implies liberty to modify language in the interests of the accurate depiction of reality. There are, of course, vast differences between Pope's treatment of language, on the one hand, and ideas about language developed by empirical philosophers, on the other hand. Locke is careful to distinguish between the civil use of words and their philosophical use, and establishes rigorous criteria only for the latter. Such philosophical criteria have little to do with Pope's alterations, which are based on intuition, sound and taste. Nevertheless, on a very basic level, Pope's conviction that his emendations are necessary for recovering the truth of Shakespeare shares a common vision with the empirical view of language that alters words to accurately describe the world.

By calling Pope's method prismatic and by drawing parallels between his textual practices and the Newtonian treatment of language, I do not imply a strict analogy between his work and Newton's achievements, or the philosophy guiding those achievements. Newton did not separate white light with an eye to creating a hierarchy among the colours. He did not have an idea of taste as a paramount instrument for the discovery of truth. The gap between self-description and

practice is another feature that divides Pope from Newton: while Newton applied a rigorous method with remarkable success, Pope's emphasis on method was stronger in rhetoric than in practice. This is precisely, however, what the scientific culture of the eighteenth century often involved: the application of popularized understandings of Newton to goals outside the physical sciences, often in imaginative ways that deviated significantly from Newton himself, but that nevertheless shared the fundamental Newtonian drive: the desire to discover underlying order.

By 1765, the Shakespearean editorial project had established itself as a truth-seeking enterprise. Shakespeare's image as a natural genius who understood the universal principles of human behaviour was entrenched in the editorial discourse about his writings. Correspondingly, the editors, through their cumulative prefatory discussions and textual practices, had charted their position as the scientists of Shakespeare, seeking to make the universal truths buried in his writings available to their readers.

[1] All citations from Johnson's Preface in this dissertation are from *Johnson on Shakespeare*. Ed. Arthur Sherbo. *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*. Volume 7. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968.

[2] Bentley's reputation was damaged in 1732 when he published a controversial edition of *Paradise Lost* in which he engaged in subjective emendations, much like those done by Pope.

Chapter 2

Nature, Nation and Knowledge in the Editions of George Steevens and

Edward Capell[1]

The universality of Shakespeare's insights about human nature—a characteristic shared with Newton's discoveries about physical nature—is a dominant theme in the editions leading to, and including, that of Johnson. In one of the most frequently quoted passages of his Preface, Johnson, probably the most eloquent promoter of Shakespeare as the poet of Nature, presents the universality of Shakespeare's characters in contrast to the particular identity of a specific nation. He contends that Shakespeare's characters "are not modified by the customs of particular places, unpractised by the rest of the world" but are rather "the genuine progeny of common humanity, such as the world will always supply and observation will always find." They act by "those general passions and principles by which all minds are agitated, and the whole system of life is continued in motion." Johnson acknowledges Shakespeare as a vernacular poet who contributed to the development of English literature, but his argument for the value of Shakespeare embodies a hierarchy that places "general nature" in a position of more importance than the English nation and its language. Johnson says that "among his other excellencies," Shakespeare "deserves to be studied as one of the original masters of our language." The use of the English language, then, is only *one* of Shakespeare's merits. His principal one, the one upon which

his greatness rests, is his ability to produce "just representations of general nature" that fulfil the mind's yearning to "repose on the stability of truth" (7: 62, 70). The same emphasis on general truths informs the work of Johnson's predecessors. These editors describe Shakespeare as a source of pride for the British nation, but their arguments for the value of his art rely on the universality of his achievement, not on his Britishness. Their image of him is, in many instances, transcendent and abstract, linking him to nature and insisting that he was able to rise above the society in which he lived.

The work of the two editors who followed Johnson, however—Edward Capell and George Steevens—is informed by a different conception of the relationship between universal truth and national particularity. Capell and Steevens continue to develop the scientifically inspired praise for Shakespeare's understanding of human nature. The idea that Shakespeare was a genius who took his ideas directly from nature instead of relying on tradition is just as prominent in their thinking as it is in the work of the earlier editors.[2] This continuity, however, coexists with a more vigorous national emphasis which they develop, arguing for Shakespeare as a British national writer whose plays must be studied in their cultural and historical context.[3] Shakespeare was instrumental for the construction of British national identity, and his national significance was an important concern for editors in the second half of the century. Today, we tend to view the relationship between the concept of human universality and that of cultural specificity as one of direct tension, even mutual exclusion. Interestingly, Capell and Steevens see no contradiction, or even tension, between the view of

Shakespeare as a universal hero and the view of him as a specifically British

figure who was shaped by the society in which he lived. The two ideas—

Shakespeare as a timeless genius and Shakespeare as a product of his country—

reinforce rather than contradict one another. Eighteenth-century Britons routinely

called Shakespeare "our Shakespeare" while also extolling the universal

significance of his discoveries.

This duality is inspired by a belief in Britain's unique role in the world in

relation to the investigation of nature. The following poem from the tellingly

named *Universal Magazine* of 1771 exemplifies how the idea of Shakespeare as a

poet of nature was informed by a sense of national destiny:

> When Nature to Athens and Rome bid adieu
>
> To Britain the Goddess, with extasy flew;
>
> . . . .
>
> On Avon's fair banks, now the subject of Fame
>
> She brought forth a boy, and Will Shakespeare his name;
>
> No egg was to egg more alike, than in feature,
>
> The smiling young rogue to his Parent, dame Nature. (XLVIII (1771), 97-
>
> 8; qtd. in Babcock 119)

According to the vigorous assertion of this poem, the fact that Shakespeare was

born in Britain and not elsewhere is not a coincidence, but a case of natural

design. It reflects Nature's choice of Britain as a privileged place for the

discovery of knowledge in the post-ancient world. Shakespeare may have been

an undisciplined young rogue, but he was to be nurtured by Nature to fulfil an important role in relation to the discovery of truth.

Another example of the link between Shakespeare and Britain's rising power can be found in Garrick's celebrated *Jubilee Ode*:

> Sweet Swan of Avon! ever may thy stream
>
> Of tuneful numbers be the darling theme;
>
> Not *Thames* himself, who in his silver course
>
> > Triumphant rolls along,
>
> Britannia's riches and her force,
>
> > Shall more harmonious flow in song. (207-12)

Garrick presents Shakespeare as a national hero when he asks: "Can British gratitude delay,/To him the glory of this isle." At the same time, Shakespeare, in Garrick's poem, is also an instrument of Nature, serving universal truth. "Nature," Garrick writes, "form'd him on her noblest plan," a plan in which British prosperity is intimately linked with the advancement of knowledge. Shakespeare is at once a national idol and "the first of poets, best of men," an "immortal" universal genius who does good to human kind as a whole by beautifully articulating truths about nature (281-82, 249, 285, 294).

The attitude of eighteenth-century Britons towards Newton showed a similar interplay between universality and nationality. While acknowledged as a universal genius, Newton was also extolled as a symbol of British achievement. In *The Life of Sir Isaac Newton*, Bernard de Fontenelle observes that

The *English* do not respect great Talents the less for being born among

them; far from seeking to lessen them by injurious Remarks, or applauding

the Envy that attacks them, they all join to raise them, and that great

Liberty, which divides them on the most important Subjects, does not

hinder them from uniting in this. All the learned Men in a Nation, which

produces so many, placed *Sir Isaac Newton* at their Head by a kind of

general Acclamation, they acknowledg'd him as their Chief and their

Master, not a rebel dar'd rise against him, not would they suffer even a

cool Admirer. His philosophy is followed by all England. (117-18)

In this patriotic climate, Newton, like Shakespeare, was hailed as both a local and

a universal hero. John Conduitt, for instance, calls him the "Glory and Ornament"

of his time and the "Glory of the *British* Nation" (61, 62). This praise goes hand

in hand with statements about his universality. William Stukeley calls Newton

"the ornament of his country, or rather of human nature" (in Conduitt 68) and

Henry Pemberton writes that Newton "not only must raise the glory of the

country, which gave him birth," but also of humanity as a whole (141). Like

Shakespeare's admirers, Newton's early biographers contextualize his universal

discoveries within the British setting. Stukeley, for instance, provides a detailed

description of the landscape around Wolsthorp, Newton's birthplace, and says that

"such is the place that produc'd the greatest genius of human race" (in Conduitt

70), implying that the place was chosen by Nature. Conduitt says that Newton

"had the happiness of being born in a land of liberty" (192), a condition which

enabled him to think freely without fear of the Inquisition and therefore make

groundbreaking discoveries. Thus his achievements, however abstract, are directly linked to the course of British history and to the character of the landscape and of the society.

The duality of universal and national that informed the images of both Newton and Shakespeare in the second half of the eighteenth century clearly influenced Capell's and Steevens's editorial approach. Capell opens his 1768 edition with an epitaph adopted from Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* 3.1056: "Qui genus humanum ingenio supervatis": "who exceeded the race of man in genius." *De Rerum Natura* is a didactic book about the laws of nature. By praising his subject through this poem, and with words often attributed to Newton (Newton was routinely praised for surpassing the human race in his genius and in his understanding of nature) Capell continues to develop the scientifically inspired praise of Shakespeare. He writes within the same trope when he says in the Dedication to the edition that Shakespeare creates "most exquisite portraits of nature; in which Man, and his manners, together with all the subtle workings of the passions . . . are more largely and finely pencil'd out . . . than can else be met with in the writings of any age or nation whatsoever" (1: n. pag.). While stressing Shakespeare's connection to nature, Capell gives equal emphasis to the influence of British culture. He writes in the Introduction that the books with which Shakespeare was best acquainted were of two kinds: the book of Nature, as well as the books of the other writers of his age (25). Therefore Shakespeare should be illustrated with reference not only to the universal principles of human nature, but also to his local origins and to the theatrical and cultural milieu in which he

worked. The understanding of Shakespeare is an inductive process requiring the collection of many details, and only with this local, culturally specific knowledge can a complete picture be obtained.

Capell views the significance of editing in terms of Britain's imperial project. He writes that "the works of such great authors" as Shakespeare "are a part of the kingdom's riches" and it is therefore "an object of national concern, that they should be sent into the world with all the advantage which they are in their own nature capable of receiving." Capell explains that Shakespeare's writings "are talk'd of wherever the name of Britain is talk'd of, that is, (thanks to some late counsels) wherever there are men," but their worth is undermined "by numerous and gross blemishes, spots in the sun's body, which prevent his glory breaking forth." He therefore resolves to "set this glorious Poet in his due state of brightness" by purifying his text of the mistakes of previous editors (1: A3). Capell thus invests the editorial programme with another dimension of urgency: Shakespeare's writings should be editorially amended not simply because they contain universal truths relevant to the development of knowledge, but because these truths are a valuable property for Britain. Much like merchandise, they should be sent into the globe-encompassing empire in the best possible state, so that their inherent value, what they are "in their own right" capable of receiving, can be actualized. While Capell's appeal to the kingdom's riches is economic in tone, it reflects more than just a view of Shakespeare as a profitable commodity. Capell is alluding to a widely accepted argument for Britain as a place of truth

with a unique responsibility for the propagation of knowledge throughout the world.

In *The Newtonians and the English Revolution*, Margaret Jacob describes how from its very inception, the culture of Newtonianism generated guiding ideas about Britain's national destiny. The "mathematically regulated universe of Newton," she explains, "gave a model of stable and prosperous polity." The idea that the Newtonian universe was an analogy for the British political system enabled British men and women to imagine that "nature was on their side." The laws of nature, together with Britain's (analogous) powerful political institutions, ensured the stability that enabled Britons to "pursue their worldly interests" (18).

This feeling of power combined with freedom gave rise to a spirit of national commitment with respect to the discovery and spread of knowledge. Britons were imbued with a sense of mission that derived from the idea that their society was a model for the rest of humanity, and therefore its achievements were to be promoted worldwide. Thanks to the popular analogies developed by his promoters, Newton's system of nature was at the very core of how Britons thought of their society. Therefore, the propagation of Newtonian knowledge was integral to the political development of the empire. In "Global Pillage: Science, Commerce, and Empire," Larry Stewart discusses the role of science in the expansionist mercantile economy of Europe. He demonstrates how, in particular in the case of Britain, trade and learning were closely linked in the national consciousness, an attitude exemplified, for instance, by Daniel Defoe's claim in

The Complete English Tradesman in Familiar Letters that the combination of trade and learning is responsible for the nation's success (826).

Like the Newtonian system of the world, Shakespeare's plays were promoted as embodiments of Englishness. William Kenrick, for instance, wrote in his *Introduction to the school of Shakespeare* that Shakespeare was not only a poet but also a moral philosopher whose works embody "a practical system of ethics." Shakespeare's plays, Kenrick contends, have "perhaps contributed more to form our national character, for humanity, justice, and benevolence, than all the theoretical books of morality which have appeared in our language" (15). In a way comparable to Newton's discoveries, the propagation of Shakespeare's writings throughout the empire serves the purpose of progress. Capell's idea of Shakespeare as a commodity cannot be separated from his idea of Shakespeare's writings as a tool for the improvement of humankind.

In the analysis of Dobson and other materialist critics, the claim that Shakespeare, the national British poet, speaks for all of humanity is a particular feature of a national discourse motivated by the desire to construct an empire. Science, however, and the ideas of universal knowledge that derived from it, were not simply tools for nation and empire building. Capell's advocacy of Shakespeare as a commodity is informed by the belief in the usefulness of the general knowledge embodied in his writings for human kind as a whole. Capell's emphasis on Shakespeare's British identity is informed by the idea that the scientific search for general knowledge is to be conducted through the inductive study of particulars. Indeed, nationalism alone does not explain the growing

emphasis on local conditions in the editing of Shakespeare. Another crucial part of the explanation is the impact of Newtonian natural philosophy, as mediated through public experimental demonstrations, on the development of literary scholarship in England as an inductive enterprise.

The Newtonian Culture of Public Demonstrations and the Scholarly Focus on Particulars

Newton's *Principia* and *Opticks* were impressive, but, for most people, difficult to understand. Not only did they radically disturb previous conceptions of the world; they were often unclear. In particular, Newton's heavy reliance on mathematics, especially in the *Principia*, drastically reduced the accessibility of his work even for many individuals who were brilliant by any other measure. John Locke, for instance, consulted Christian Huygens in order to confirm that Newton's mathematical propositions and proofs were correct (Stewart *Rise of Public Science* 102). In response to these difficulties, Newton's promoters embarked upon a long-term effort to clarify his natural philosophy. Their most popular means were public experimental demonstrations that would render his general laws more accessible.

In *Physio-Mechanical Experiments*, Francis Hauskbee describes these demonstrations as "repetitions of the experiments, simplified and clarified, to illustrate the basic principles of natural philosophy" (n. pag.). Their aim was to show the truth of Newton's general principles through concrete, particular applications. The experimenters shunned abstraction and embraced induction. Their demonstrations aimed to convince a diverse audience of general truths by

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showing how those truths emerged from an examination of particular, concrete, material details. For something to be believed, the experimentalists asserted, it had to be shown through the operations of actual objects in daily life. Hauksbee described a culture "almost generally convinc'd, that instead of amusing themselves with *Vain Hypotheses*, which seem to differ little from Romances, there's no other way of *Improving* Natural Philosophy, but by *Demonstrations* and *Conclusions* founded upon *Experiments* judiciously and accurately made" (qtd. in Stewart 118). Michel Baridon notes that "individualizing features were presented as essential to the establishment of truth and the *a priori, ex suppositione* method was abandoned." The concept of *a priori systems* was rejected in favour of the specific sense of the "history" of the demonstration, which can be defined as "a relation providing a full and accurate record of the particular conditions in which an experiment was conducted" (783).

The focus on particulars that animated the Newtonian public culture ushered in an epistemological change in British society that had far reaching consequences beyond the advocacy of Newton's ideas. Attention to local details found its way into many areas of scholarship that previously tended to take a more abstract approach to their subject matters. In the second half of the eighteenth century, previously metaphysical topics were increasingly thought about in concrete, local, material terms.

A powerful instance of this trend is Robert Lowth's *De sacra poesi Hebraeorum praelectiones academicae Oxonii habitae* (*Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*). Lowth controversially argued that while Hebrew poetry

represented the words of God, it was also a cultural document that contained ordinary, low details of daily life. The poetry of the *Old Testament*, Lowth argues, juxtaposes divine thoughts with ordinary details "in order to depict the obscure by the more manifest, the subtle by the more substantial." It is only through the reader's close engagement with the low, often crude, details, of the *Old Testament* that its divine purpose is to be achieved: "From ideas, which in themselves appear coarse, unsuitable, and totally unworthy of so great an object, the mind naturally recedes, and passes suddenly to the contemplation of the object itself, and of its inherent magnitude and importance" (118, 364).

Next to the Bible, the Shakespearean canon was the most important text of eighteenth-century England in terms of the editorial attention that it commanded. What Lowth says about the Hebrew Bible, that it reaches transcendental truths by engaging the readers in particular details taken from the local culture, was precisely what Capell and Steevens say about Shakespeare. It is this focus on cultural particulars that differentiates them from Shakespeare's earlier editors. Indeed, it is not a coincidence that among Lowth's critics the most virulent was William Warburton, the editor who advanced an abstract view of Shakespeare's genius as divorced from his use of language. Unlike Lowth, Warburton tended to view the Bible's importance as revealed truth only, not as a cultural document, and was disturbed by Lowth's positive attention to its coarse and mundane aspects, which for Warburton were only the reflections of a primitive culture, not in any way essential for the divinity of the scriptures. The difference between Lowth and Warburton with respect to the Hebrew Bible mirrors the difference

between Capell and Steevens on the one hand and their predecessors on the other hand with respect to Shakespeare. The editors in the first half of the eighteenth century tended to look at the times in which Shakespeare lived and at the language that he used as relatively barbaric. They marvelled at his ability to transcend this context and make discoveries of lasting validity and usefulness, and they sought to purify his writings from the flaws caused by the milieu in which he worked. Capell and Steevens, on the other hand, advocated editorial immersion in Shakespeare's context. Hamlet says that the aim of drama is both "to hold . . . the mirror up to nature" and "to show . . . the very age and body of the time his form and pressure" (3.2.20-24). This, for Capell and Steevens, was precisely what Shakespeare's writings achieved: they provide a reflection of the universal principles of human nature through a close engagement in culturally specific detail. For Capell and Steevens, the low and local aspects of Shakespeare are not to be dismissed as interfering with his universal genius. Much like the low aspects of Hebrew poetry in relation to its divine truths, they are to be treated inductively, as vehicles for understanding the general truths that Shakespeare discovered. The emphasis on the low and local aspects of Shakespeare was a significant change from editorial attitudes in the earlier decades of the century. However, the underlying motivation which informed that change remained the same: the desire to uncover the general truths contained in Shakespeare. The development of literary scholarship as an inductive discipline made the previously shunned aspects of Shakespeare increasingly important for the discovery of these truths.

General Truths, Cultural Particulars and the Annotation of Shakespeare

The developing respect for the English language and culture of the past, inspired by the scientific insistence that general truths are to be understood through local particulars, transformed the editing of Shakespeare in the second half of the eighteenth century by encouraging the editors to pay meticulous attention to Shakespeare's language. Even though both were celebrated as national heroes, the emphasis on culturally specific particulars had transformative implications for the study of Shakespeare that it could never have had for the study of Newton. Newton made his discoveries in the language of mathematics. The analogies that his promoters developed between the laws of nature and the British nation—however compelling and influential—were by their very nature no more than analogies. There was nothing about Newton's discoveries as he himself presented them that was explicitly, consciously British. To study Newton seriously, one would have to immerse oneself in the language of mathematics— not the English language—and think about the physical universe—not about British culture. Shakespeare, on the other hand, wrote in the vernacular language about issues related to British society and history. By reading old books, the editor must immerse himself in the world of Shakespeare's England and attempt to understand how Shakespeare inductively reached an understanding of the universal principles of human nature through his familiarity with local details.

The editing of Shakespeare benefited from a general surge in antiquarian scholarship and interest in local history during the second half of the eighteenth century. The inductive emphasis on the study of particulars contributed to the

creation of many antiquarian societies and to the publications of numerous works about the English past. In particular, the interaction of nationalism with scientific ideas resulted in a newfound respect for and interest in the English language. Traditionally, the education of England's learned classes was centred on, and conducted in, Greek and Latin. However, by the mid-eighteenth century, a new respect for the English language emerged.

The best example of this trend was the huge commercial success of Lowth's *A Short Introduction to English Grammar*, first published in 1762. Lowth's *Grammar* compares English to other languages in order to highlight its simplicity. English, he argues, "is perhaps of all the present European Languages by much the most simple in its form and construction." He argues that literacy in English "is the true foundation upon which all Literature, properly so called, ought to be raised." Lowth therefore advocates that Englishmen should master their own language first before learning other tongues (iii, xii).

Lowth's association of simplicity with the advancement of knowledge mirrors the claims of the Newtonians that simplicity, as enabled by mathematics, is at the core of useful knowledge. The popularity of science was therefore important for the growing, patriotically informed feeling that the English language was particularly well suited for the understanding of reality. Thus Britain's national destiny as a promoter of knowledge also required the cultivation of the vernacular. For Shakespeareans in the second half of the eighteenth century, this implied a move away from the idea that language was inessential to Shakespeare's genius towards the idea that his use of English must be studied

closely to examine how it facilitated his articulation of universal truths. While the meticulous attention to Shakespeare's language was a significant shift from the relative disregard for his language and from the idea that his language was not an essential aspect of his genius, this shift was informed by the persistence of the desire to discover general truths in Shakespeare.

A prominent example of the increasing respect awarded to the English language in Shakespeare studies was the popularity of Richard Farmer's *An Essay on the Learning of Shakespeare* in the second half of the eighteenth century. Farmer's *Essay* tackles one of the most controversial questions in eighteenth-century Shakespearean circles: was Shakespeare learned in Latin and Greek, or did he glean the references to classical literature in his plays from translations of the classics into English? Some Shakespeareans who had low esteem for the English language in Shakespeare's time firmly believed that he had the knowledge and the interest to study the classics in the original languages. Farmer, on the other hand, believed that Shakespeare's knowledge of the classical languages was minimal, or even non existent. Using his own extensive private library of Elizabethan books, Farmer demonstrates that the sources for Shakespeare's classical references were either English translations of the classics available during Shakespeare's time, or allusions to the classics found in the plays of Shakespeare's more learned colleagues.

Farmer provides numerous detailed textual examples to prove his point. For instance, he analyzes what Octavius says in the third Act of *Antony and Cleopatra* about the Egyptian queen, that:

> Unto her
>
> He gave the 'stablishment of Egypt, made her
>
> Of lower Syria, Cyprus, Lydia
>
> Absolute queen. (3.4.8-11)

Those who believed that Shakespeare knew the classics assumed that "Lydia" was a careless error on the part of Renaissance printers because Plutarch, whom they assumed to be the source for Shakespeare, writes Libya. Farmer, on his part, astutely observes that Lydia is the name that appears in Thomas North's 1579 English translation of Plutarch. North's translation reads "First of all he did establish Cleopatra queene of Ægypt, of Cyprus, of Lydia, and of lower Syria," making it likely that it was indeed Shakespeare's source (11). The importance of Farmer's work is in his methodology, which hinges on the claim that the answer to the question of Shakespeare's learning should not rely on supposition (or the wishful thinking of his admirers), but on an immersion in the extant texts from the times in which Shakespeare lived and in the history of the English language. In this way, Farmer applies an inductive method focusing on local particulars to a project informed by a patriotic interest in the English language and past.

In the editorial realm, the bringing to bear of knowledge of English language, history and culture on the explication of Shakespeare was increasingly seen as necessary for understanding the universal truths embodied in Shakespeare. This, in particular, was Steevens's major contribution. A poem in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for October 1787 entitled "Shakespeare's bedside, or his doctors enumerated" describes Steevens entering the Shakespearean scene

"loaded with black-letter/books" which "no one e'er read but himself" (913). Steevens was a prolific, independently wealthy scholar of Elizabethan drama who, over the period of many years, acquired exhaustive knowledge of the literature and culture of Shakespeare's age and employed it for the illustration of Shakespeare. His Shakespearean career began as a contributor of notes to Johnson's 1765 edition. In these notes, Steevens utilizes his knowledge of Shakespeare's cultural environment to explain and restore the text. For example, he illustrates Sir Toby's question in *Twelfth Night*, following Maria's entrance, "how now my nettle of India?," by quoting from a natural history book to show that Shakespeare "must have meant a plant called the *urtica marina*, abounding in the Indian seas" (n. pag.). In another instance, he explains the expression "the first row of the Rubrick" in *Hamlet* by noting that the word "Rubrick" was introduced by Rowe in place of "Pons Chanson," which appeared in the first Folio. Consulting the old quarto of 1611, Steevens observes that the words used there are "*pious* chanson," a term which he is able to illustrate. The pious chansons, he writes, "were a kind of Christmas Carol, containing some scripture History, thrown into loose rhimes, and sung about the streets by common people, when they went at that reason to beg alms. *Hamlet* is here repeating some scraps from songs of this kind, and when *Polonius* enquires what followed them, he refers him to the first row (i.e. division) of one of these" (n. pag.).

Impressed by Steevens's learning, Johnson invited him to collaborate on a thorough revision of his 1765 edition. The ten-volume product, *The Plays of William Shakespear*, was published in 1773. Although it was a collaborative

undertaking, most of the work was in fact done by Steevens. The diligent

Steevens wrote hundreds of notes that used his knowledge of Elizabethan culture

to shed light on Shakespeare through the method of parallel quotations. In

addition to the knowledge that he acquired during many years of research,

Steevens also had access to an additional invaluable resource: an annotated copy

of Gerard Langbaine's *Account of the English Dramatick Poets* (1691).

The historically and linguistically informed study of Shakespeare did not

begin with Steevens. The previous editors—most notably Theobald—also used

whatever knowledge they had of Shakespeare's period to explain obscure words

and passages. Theobald believed, much like Steevens, that to do justice to

Shakespeare, "an Editor . . . should be well vers'd in the History and Manners of

his Author's Age" (1: xlv-xlvi). No other editor, however, was in possession of

so much knowledge about Shakespeare's period as Steevens was, nor argued as

energetically as he did for the importance of studying Shakespeare historically. In

the Advertisement to his and Johnson's edition, Steevens argues for the

importance of non-Shakespearean Elizabethan drama for the understanding of

Shakespeare. While he was working on his edition, Steevens came across names

of works that he could not find. He blames these losses on the civil war, during

which many important authors, he complains, "were preserved to languish

without regard." In his view, these missing sources have created a critical gap in

Shakespearean scholarship because Shakespeare's language and meaning cannot

be fully understood "till such books are thoroughly examined as cannot easily at

present be collected, if at all" (Vickers *Critical Heritage* 5: 515).

While many other editors looked down at Shakespeare's contemporaries to emphasize his exceptionalism, Steevens has a more collaborative view of Shakespeare's writing practices. Much like a scientist who collaborates with other investigators for the discovery of the truth, Shakespeare relied on the contributions of other authors in his investigation of human nature. Steevens therefore vigorously lobbies for the preservation of non-Shakespearean Elizabethan literature as a tool for the illustration of Shakespeare. In 1779, he persuaded the printer John Nichols to publish *Six Old Plays, on Which Shakspeare Founded his Measure for Measure, Comedy of Errors, Taming of the Shrew, King John, K. Henry IV. and K. Henry V., King Lear.* The first volume featured the plays *Promos and Cassandra, Menaechmi, The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Troublesome Reign of King John Part I,* and the second *The Troublesome Reign of King John, The Famous Victories of Henry V* and *The True Chronicle History of King Leir and his Three Daughters, Gondrill, Regan, and Cordella.* In the "Advertisement" to the edition Nichols cites Steevens's opinion that "these six dramatic pieces . . . are requisite in an entire state of his illustration." Steevens values these plays not so much for their inherent quality, which he considers inferior to Shakespeare, but because they provided materials for Shakespeare to borrow and hence afford an insight into his creative process (vii). Today, editions of Shakespeare usually discuss the sources of his plays, and often print them either in full or in the form of excerpts. This is a practice that Steevens helped to establish by insisting that Shakespeare achieved his universal insights into human nature through close observation of his local environment. Therefore, knowledge

of the literary background of Shakespeare's period is necessary for the understanding of his genius.

Steevens continued his Shakespearean research beyond the publication of the 1773 edition, and in 1778, a second edition was released. The notes to the edition displayed Steevens's impressive knowledge of Elizabethan history and literature. Steevens illustrated obscure expressions in Shakespeare by using the method of parallel readings, drawing on the writings of Shakespeare's contemporary authors, as well as on other passages within his own canon. To bring Elizabethan history to life as vividly as possible, some of the notes were accompanied by illustrations. For instance, to clarify Falstaff's reference to a fan in *Merry Wives of Windsor*, Steevens provides a detailed account of the use of fans in Shakespeare's time, complete with four drawings of these accessories (1: 273). In addition to specific notes, Steevens also expanded the body of historical documents appended to the edition. He printed the text of a patent that James I gave to the King's Men in 1603, a facsimile of three of Shakespeare's signatures and the Stationers' Register entries of the plays.

The twelve-volume edition was received with acclamation. The *Monthly Review* for January 1780 praises the edition as "an improved and truly valuable edition of the Works of a poet who hath long been called among the most astonishing phenomena of human genius." The reviewer invokes the importance of both nature and culture for the true inductive study of Shakespeare when he says that Steevens is the only one who deserves to work with Johnson as an equal collaborator on an edition of Shakespeare because his "diligence and knowledge"

complements Johnson's "acuteness of understanding." While Johnson brings to the task an understanding of the general principles of human nature, Steevens is able to illustrate those passages "which owe all their force and beauty to some local and temporary circumstances" (12-13). Both are necessary for an inductive understanding of Shakespeare. Together, Johnson and Steevens provide a complete picture of Shakespeare as a British poet who was able to understand the universal principles of human nature by observing the particulars of his own cultural environment. The focus on particulars is not a move away from the idea that Shakespeare's major achievement is the discovery of general, universal principles. This focus is in the same rich vein of Newtonian inductive science that advocated the collection of particulars with the faith that general patterns would emerge.

The Return to the Quartos

In addition to the writing of historically and linguistically informed notes, the increasingly nationalist approach to Shakespeare also resulted in growing editorial attention to the quartos of his plays. As the English language gained esteem as a worthy object of study, so grew the editorial interest in recovering what Shakespeare actually wrote instead of modifying his language in order to "rescue" his essential truths from vulgar expression. Since, however, no manuscript in Shakespeare's handwriting is extant, what Shakespeare actually wrote is far from certain. The question facing all editors of Shakespeare—in the eighteenth century and today—is which text to base their editions on. Some of Shakespeare's plays were published individually in the quarto format. Seven

years after Shakespeare's death, in 1623, his friends the players John Heminges and Henry Condell published a collection of 36 of his plays, bound in the folio format. Three subsequent editions appeared in 1632, 1663 and 1685. Like the quartos, the Folios were not meticulously edited books conforming to the standards that came to be expected during the eighteenth century and later. Since there are often significant textual differences between the Folios and the quartos, and among the different quartos and Folios of a given play, the question of which text most closely represents Shakespeare's intentions and genius is open to editorial interpretation.

The standard practice in the eighteenth century was for each editor to rely on the edition of his immediate predecessor. Thus Rowe based his edition on the fourth Folio of 1685, Pope based his on Rowe's third edition of 1714, Theobald (despite their sharp disagreements about method) on that of Pope, and so on. Peter Seary notes, in reference to Pope's edition, that the practice of basing one's edition on that of the previous editor was to a large extent encouraged by the Tonson firm, which bought the copyright for Shakespeare's plays from the owners of the rights to the fourth folio. "The Tonsons' claim to the copyright of Shakespeare's plays," he explains, "was embodied in Rowe's text, and in a literal sense Jacob Tonson jun. expected Pope to improve this particular piece of 'property'" (58-59, 133). The editors, however, were aware that relying entirely on the previous edition when various older versions of the plays were extant was not a sound textual procedure. They therefore advocated the use of collation, a procedure which involves comparing the different versions of each play line by

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line, to create the "best" text. The quartos were especially important for the

process of collation, since they were the oldest surviving versions, and therefore

potentially closest to Shakespeare. Heminges and Condell condemned the quartos

in the process of advertising their own edition. Eighteenth-century editors,

however, often associated them with authenticity. They believed that the

publishers of the quartos worked with manuscripts close to what Shakespeare

wrote, and that therefore they were potentially useful for recovering

Shakespeare's original words. Pope argues that with the exception of literal

errors, the quartos, however bad, are superior to the folios. The players, he

argues, embellished the folio with "trifling and bombast passages" (1: xvi), and

therefore a correct edition of the plays must rely on the collation of the Folios

with the available quartos. Theobald proposes a similar textual policy when he

states: "I have thought it my duty, in the first place, by a diligent and laborious

Collation to take in the Assistances of all the older Copies" (1: xlii).

     Unfortunately, neither Pope nor the more systematic Theobald (nor the

other editors in the first half of the century) practiced what they advocated with

sufficient rigour. Pope handled the task of collation by holding parties for his

friends in which each invitee was given a different copy of the play, and while

one would read, the others would note differences on their copies. The results

were not always reliable, and Pope was very selective in integrating quarto

readings into his edition. Theobald, unsurprisingly, was more thorough than Pope

in taking into account quarto readings, but even he was not completely systematic.

The same gap between editorial statements and practice affected the other

editions, which typically integrated only partial and selective materials from the quartos in cases where the editors felt that these improved the quality of the writing. It was only with Steevens, and especially with Capell, that the quartos finally received a comprehensive scholarly treatment.

In the "Advertisement to the Reader" of the 1773 edition Steevens criticizes "[t]he want of adherence to the old copies" in previous editions and offers to solve that problem with collation (Vickers *Critical Heritage* 5:511). In 1766, before his collaboration with Johnson appeared, Steevens published a four-volume octavo collection entitled *Twenty of the Plays of Shakespeare*. The edition reproduced those plays available in the quarto format with collation notes in cases where more than one quarto of a play survived. In other words, Steevens printed in full the text of only one of the quartos of each play, the one which he considered most loyal to what Shakespeare wrote, but footnoted it with comparative notes. In the case of *Othello*, for example, he chose the text of the 1622 quarto, but promises his readers that it "has been collated with another printed in 1630" (10: n. pag.) and provides notes which record differences between the 1630 and the 1622 versions. Beyond these collation notes, Steevens's volumes were bare of the explanatory notes that formed an indispensable part of other editions.

Steevens justifies the printing of the quartos in the Preface to the edition by invoking the larger project of recovering and preserving old English literature: "It is not merely to obtain justice to Shakespeare, that I have made this collection . . . . The general interest of English literature, and the attention due to our own

language and history, require that our ancient writings should be diligently

reviewed" (1: 13). He complains that if the English language "be recalled to a

strict examination . . . it will then be lamented that no regular collection was ever

formed of the old English books; from which, as from ancient repositories, we

might recover words and phrases." Such a collection, Steevens contends, would

have been invaluable for the illustration of Shakespeare, as many of his

obscurities can be clarified by considering how Shakespeare's contemporaries

employ parallel expressions (1: 11).

　　　While Steevens played a crucial role in lobbying for the preservation of

old books, his collation work was by no means free of the discrepancy between

rhetoric and practice that plagued the editing of Shakespeare in the eighteenth

century. In his *Remarks, Critical and Illustrative, on the Text and Notes of the*

Last Edition of Shakespeare, a critique of the 1778 edition published in 1783, the

scholar Joseph Ritson charges Steevens with misleading the public about his

editorial procedures. Ritson accuses Steevens that while he claims that the text of

the edition "has been constantly compared with the most authentic copies,

whether collation was absolutely necessary to the sense, or not," in reality he had

not even compared the different Folios with each other. Ritson condemns this

neglect with harsh words when he says: "What an abuse of that confidence and

credit which the public naturally place in an editor of rank and character, to tell

them that 'by a diligent collation of all the old copies hitherto discovered, and the

judicious restoration of ancient readings, the text of this author seems now finally

settled!'" In reality, it is clear "that all the old copies had not been diligently

collated, that ancient readings had NOT been judiciously restored, and that the text is no more finally settled at present than it was in the time of Theobald, Hanmer, and Warburton; nay, that it is, at large, in the same state of inaccuracy and corruption in which it was left by Mr. Rowe" (Vickers *Critical Heritage* 6: 366-37). This sharp attack should be taken with a grain of salt, as its author was known for his fiery temper and exaggerated charges against fellow scholars. At the same time, it is true that Steevens did not practice collation with the same seriousness that he preached it, largely because most of his time was occupied with historical research and with the writing of thousands of notes.

The only eighteenth-century editor of Shakespeare who made the return to the original Shakespeare through collation his foremost priority was Capell. Like Steevens's 1766 collection, Capell's 1768 edition was bare of commentary and simply reproduced the text of Shakespeare.[4] Unlike any other eighteenth-century edition, however, Capell's edition was the result of over two decades of meticulous collation. In the Introduction, Capell explains that he decided to focus his editorial efforts on collation after reading Thomas Hanmer's 1744 edition and feeling a shock caused by that editor's unsystematic approach. In his Preface, Hanmer promises an objective method designed to recover what Shakespeare wrote. He says that "this rule hath been most strictly observed, not to give a loose to fancy, or indulge a licentious Spirit of criticism, as if it were fit for any one to presume to judge what Shakespear ought to have written, instead of endeavouring to discover truly and retrieve what he did write." Hanmer assures his readers that "so great caution hath been used in this respect, that no alterations have been

made but what the sense necessarily required, what the measure of the verse often helped to point out, and what the similiture of words in the false reading and in the true, generally speaking, appeared very well to justify" (1: ii-iii). Hanmer's promise is a striking example of the gap between self-theorizing and practice that plagued the editing of Shakespeare in the eighteenth century, especially during the century's first half. While Hanmer promises his readers the restoration of Shakespeare's original words, he, like Pope, engaged in extensive speculative emendations guided by taste. For Hanmer, these alterations may well have seemed "what the sense necessarily required, and what the measure of the verse often helped to point out," but to the textually oriented Capell this was no more than "wantoning in very license of conjecture." Capell tells the readers that he decided to embark on the arduous task of collation because of his exacerbation with the "wretched condition" that Shakespeare "was reduc'd to" by Hanmer and other editors. Speaking about himself in the third person, he figures collation as a patriotic act of preservation: having "consider'd the fatal consequences that must inevitably follow the imitation of so much license," he "resolv'd himself to be the champion; and to exert to the uttermost such abilities as he was master of, to save from further ruin an edifice of this dignity, which *England* must for ever glory in" (1: 19).

For Capell, an edition of Shakespeare inspired by pride in Britain's literary heritage, as well as a commitment to the science of editing, necessitated an attempt to recover what Shakespeare actually wrote, regardless of whether or not his style and language were pleasing to eighteenth-century standards of taste. In

1745, Capell embarked on the project of collecting every version of each play that he could find. The collection that he assembled contained the previous eighteenth-century editions, the seventeenth-century folios, all the known quartos except for six that he was unable to find, and additional twelve quartos that had not been previously consulted by other editors (Stone and Kahrl 174). His aim was to compare them so that he could identify a "first principle"—Shakespeare's true authorial intensions. The meticulous process of collation took Capell over two decades to complete. During those years, he compared the different surviving variants of each play. He generally judged the oldest quarto to be the best text and printed it with only those alterations which he judged to be necessary. Capell limits editorial correction, in general, to what he views as obvious errors in transmission. He states his commitment to the surviving texts of Shakespeare in his Introduction when he says that "what is added without authority of some ancient edition, is printed in a black letter: what alter'd, and what thrown out, constantly taken notice of; some few times in a note, where the matter was long, or of a complex nature, but, more generally, at the bottom of the page; where what is put out of the text" (1: 48). For example, in *Hamlet*, after the appearance of the ghost in Act I, Scene IV of Capell's edition, Hamlet says, in the quarto text which Capell used as his source, "My fate cries out,/And makes each petty artery in this body/As handy as the Nemean lion's nerve." Capell printed "hardy" instead of "handy" in order to amend what in his view was a printing error (10: 26).

Capell was the first eighteenth-century editor of Shakespeare to work in relative independence from other editors. Until Capell, editors not only based

their editions on those of their predecessors, but also physically prepared their text for the printer by marking up a copy of that predecessor's work with their corrections. This was a habit that was likely responsible for the perpetuation of numerous errors. Capell, however, insisted on transcribing the plays from scratch. His image as an obsessive scholar was reinforced by a legend that he transcribed each play not once, but ten times (Walker 138). He did, however, probably transcribe each play only once, and a complete transcription in his hand is extant at Trinity College, Cambridge. The dates on that transcription suggest that Capell transcribed for at least seventeen years: from 25 November 1749 to 1 August 1766 (Pope's collation parties, by comparison, took place over a period of only four years: from 1720 to 1724).

In 1768, the edition was published, with the title *Mr William Shakespeare his Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies, Set Out by Himself in Quarto* (1768). The words "set out by himself," namely by Shakespeare, confidently declare Capell's opinion about the closeness of the quartos to Shakespeare, an opinion that set him apart from the other editors (compare, for instance, to Steevens's more factual "*printed in Quarto* during his Life-time"). Previous editors, even though they believed in collation, generally regarded the quartos as corrupt theatre texts that were printed from documents such as prompt copies and were sadly distanced from what Shakespeare *would* have written had he been able to dedicate his time to poetry rather than to the theatre or had he cared about the preservation of his writings. For the editors, the plays as they survived in the quarto and folio formats did not do justice to Shakespeare's genius, a fact which they blamed on

the theatre. Warburton, for instance, wrote that Shakespeare's poetry emerged from the theatre so "disguised and travestied, that no classic Author, after having run ten secular Stages thro' the blind Cloisters of Monks and Canons, ever came in half so mangled a condition" (1: vii). Pope complained about the "innumerable Errors, which have risen from one source, the ignorance of the Players, both as his actors, and as his editors." He believes that "not *Shakespear* only, but *Aristotle* or *Cicero*, had their works undergone the same fate, might have appear'd to want sense as well as learning." The theatre was not only a bad preserver of Shakespeare's writings, but also a negative influence on Shakespeare himself, tempting him to "please the lowest of people, and to keep the worst of company." These conditions, for Pope, "appear sufficient to mislead and depress the greatest Genius upon earth," and he is certain that the surviving texts are no reflection of Shakespeare's potential as a writer: "there can be no question but had *Shakespear* published his works himself . . . we should not only be certain which are genuine; but should find in those that are, the errors lessened by some thousands." He claims with confidence that the quartos do not represent Shakespeare's own work: "What makes me think that most of these were not publish'd by him, is the excessive carelessness of the press: every page is so scandalously false spelled, and almost all the learned or unusual words so intolerably mangled" (1: ix, xv xx).

Capell bases his edition on a different assumption: "Let it . . . be granted," he announces, "that these quarto's are the Poet's own copies, however they were come by; hastily written at first, and issuing from presses most of them as corrupt, and not overseen by himself, not by any of his friends" (10-11). Speaking about

himself in the third person, Capell provides an inspired description of how the process of collation led him to endorse the quartos as Shakespeare's authentic copies. The editor was duly busying himself with the collation of every copy in his possession

> till, at last, a ray of light broke forth upon him, by which he hop'd to find his way through the wilderness of these editions into that fair country the Poet's real habitation. He had not proceeded far in his collation, before he saw cause to come to this resolution;—to stick invariably to the old editions, (that is, the best of them) which hold now the place of the manuscripts, no scrap of the Author's writing having the luck to come down to us; and never to depart from them, but in cases where reason, and the uniform practice of men of the greatest note in this art, tell him. (20)[5]

On the one hand, Capell's description presents an idealized image of Shakespearean authenticity that contrasts the "wilderness" of the corrupt editions with the "real habitation" of Shakespeare's natural genius. Capell does not equate Shakespeare's natural genius with textual perfection. On the contrary, he contends that Shakespeare is "at once the greatest instance of genius in producing noble things, and of negligence in providing for them afterwards" (1: 1-2). Capell shares the other editors' admiration for Shakespeare's characters and says that the Shakespearean canon "has beauties in it, and grandeurs, of which no other author was capable" (1: 37-38). At the same time, however, the condition of the canon is profoundly problematic: the division of acts and scenes is not clear, entrances and

exits are not clearly indicated, speeches are occasionally attributed to the wrong persons, prose is printed as verse and verse is printed as prose. These are only some of the imperfections that riddle Shakespeare's texts. These problems, in Capell's view, do not indicate that the quartos are not Shakespeare's true texts. Rather, they "might well be expected in the hasty draughts of so negligent an Author, who neither saw at once all he might want, nor, in some instances, gave himself sufficient time to consider the fitness of what he was then penning" (12-13). Rather than be corrected by imaginative editors, these imperfections "must remain as marks of the Poet's negligence, and of the haste with which his pieces were compos'd" (1: 29).

Capell, then, does not deny the flaws of Shakespeare's writing. His conception of the relationship between the "essence" of Shakespeare's genius and the imperfect state of his texts, however, is significantly different from that of other editors. While previous editors tend to view that imperfect state as interfering with and degrading Shakespeare's genius, Capell insists that textual confusion is in fact a necessary consequence of Shakespeare's natural genius, and of the conditions under which he laboured, and that it should therefore not be emended. Much like the crude details of Hebrew poetry for Pope, these low aspects for Capell are essential vehicles for the text's articulation of general truths, because it was only through close observation of his local culture that Shakespeare was able to induce general principles about human nature.

Capell opens his Introduction with a tantalizing description of Shakespeare as an ostrich that neglects its valuable egg, leaving it "to be disposed

of as chance pleases; either brought to maturity by the sun's kindly warmth, or else crushed by beasts and the feet of passers-by." This, for Capell, makes the ostrich a "fit emblem for almost every great genius." The emphasis on "almost every great genius" deflects much of the blame for the confusing state of Shakespeare's text away from the theatre and from the historical context. Capell attributes it instead to the very nature of overabundant genius that tends to generate confusion and disorder just as it discovers great truths. Just like the ostrich, geniuses are careless about the preservation of their findings, leaving their cultivation to others: "they conceive and produce with ease those noble issues of human understanding, but incubation, the dull work of putting them correctly upon paper and afterwards publishing, is a task they cannot away with" (1: 1). The "true," authoritative Shakespeare, therefore, is contained in the surviving, disorganized texts, not in a heavily emended text.[6]

From the point of view of a present-day reader, the endorsement of heterogeneous, disorganized writing as a characteristic of genius may seem "romantic" and unscientific. This is because we associate science with orderly writing that conforms to rigorous formal requirements. However, the view of a confusing and diverse body of writings as a site of great truths has a fascinating affinity with discourses about scientific writing that developed with the rise of the new science. In "The Classical Silva and the Generic Development of Scientific Writing in Seventeenth-Century England," Frans De Bruyn explores the dissatisfaction of the new scientists, most prominently Francis Bacon, with the artificiality of rhetorically polished forms of writing, which they considered

unsuitable for communicating knowledge gained through observation.[7] "One of

Bacon's persistent complaints about the state of natural philosophy in his time,"

De Bruyn explains, "was that its practitioners tended to jump far too quickly from

an inadequate base of facts, observations, and experiments to grand, overarching

explanatory systems," a habit encouraged by modes of writing that promoted

completeness and polish. This dissatisfaction led Bacon, and other natural

scientists, to advocate the revival of ancient modes of writing which they viewed

as more open-ended and hence conducive to inductive knowledge-seeking

inquiry. In *Novum Organum*, Bacon writes that "the first and most ancient

seekers after truth were wont . . . to throw the knowledge which they gathered

from contemplation of things . . . into aphorisms; that is, into short and scattered

sentences, not linked together by artificial method; and did not pretend or profess

to embrace the entire art" (*Works of Francis Bacon* 4: 85). Another ancient genre

which became surprisingly important for the development of the new science was

the *silva*, which is the primary focus of De Bruyn's study. The silva was a

miscellaneous collection form. Its name derives from the Latin word for "forest"

or "wood," which also acquired the meaning of "pieces of raw material" or

"material for construction." This form "of mixed character and content," De

Bruyn contends, "was to prove of the greatest importance to those who composed

scientific treatises or edited and contributed to early scientific journals." Among

those who consciously invoked the silva's heterogeneity, variety and lack of

artificial rhetorical polish as best equipped to communicate observation-based

knowledge were, for instance, Bacon and John Evelyn, a founding member of the

Royal Society. In his *Sylva Sylvarum: or a Natural History* (1627), Bacon presents a miscellany of experiments and observations that may appear disorganized. William Rawley, the editor of the work, reported in his introductory note "To the Reader" Bacon's premonition "that men (no doubt) will think many of the experiments contained in this collection to be vulgar and trivial, mean and sordid, curious and fruitless." In 1733, Peter Shaw published an edition of Bacon's work equipped with a Glossary of terms "Invented, or Used in a New Sense by the Author." He defines *Sylva Sylvarum* as "a *Wood* of Experiments and Observations; or a Collection of Materials, ready procured, and laid up for forming particular Histories of Nature and Art, in the Author's Inductive manner" and defends the genre as scientifically sound. "Many persons," he says, view the work "as a kind of *Rhapsody*, or trifling Collection of *Rumors and Relations*," and yet "unless this plain and homely Method be pursued, in producing a History of Nature, Mankind must still be left to struggle with Difficulties, and grovel in Darkness." The silva provides the readers with an opportunity of "discovering the excellency of those things, which, tho extensively useful, are not dress'd out with the Philological Ornaments, or other Embellishments, really foreign, and prejudicial, to the Investigation of Truth." Shaw therefore urges the readers not to be "rash in censuring the Author's *Sylva Sylvarum*; which, when we'll understood, seems pregnant with the *Proper Matter* for a *General History of Nature and Experience*" (qtd. in De Bruyn 347-70).

As Newton, and science, came to be seen as symbols of systematic inquiry and presentation, the association of the new science with genres such as the

aphorism and the silva was generally forgotten in the popular imagination. However, Newton's own writing style was very far from what today would be acceptable as scientifically rigorous writing, or from what in his time was widely expected from a philosophical inquiry into the operations of nature. One of the common early objections to Newton's writing was that it was incomprehensible because it lacked the polish and structure that readers of Aristotle, Descartes and the other philosophers preceding Newton came to expect. Mordechai Feingold notes that "the incomprehensibility of the *Principia* . . . was rooted in its dense proliferation of radical ideas, ambiguities and geometrical constructions" that did not follow "traditional canons of mathematical intelligibility (67). Indeed, one of the reasons why the Newtonian industry of books, lecturers and public demonstrators was so lucrative was that Newton's writings did not conform to accepted stylistic and formal requirements and were therefore considered to be in desperate need of illustration.

Keeping the "unsystematic origins" of modern scientific writing in mind makes Capell's endorsement of the heterogeneous text as a sign of genius appear less "unscientific" than it may otherwise seem. Many of the images and patterns of thinking that De Bruyn cites in relation to the development of scientific writing recall the editorial view of the Shakespearean text as a miscellaneous body of materials that often seems to contain vulgar and trivial pieces "thrown together," but that nevertheless is "pregnant with proper matter" for the discovery of general truths. It is fascinating to recall in this context, bearing in mind that silva means forest, Johnson's description of Shakespeare's writing as a "forest, in which oaks

extend their branches, and pines tower in the air, interspersed sometimes with weeds and brambles, and sometimes giving shelter to myrtles and roses; filling the eye with awful pomp, and gratifying the mind with endless diversity" (7: 84). The editors share a view of Shakespeare as "nature," a site of irregularity and diversity that nevertheless contains underlying order. There is, however, an important difference between Capell and the previous editors with respect to their view of what the editor is to do with the "natural resources" of Shakespeare.

Early eighteenth-century editors (with the relative exception of Theobald) were driven by an impulse to amend Shakespeare's irregular writing so that his truths would shine through more clearly. In doing so, they were influenced by the growing association of science with clear expression, encouraged by the Royal Society and by philosophers such as John Locke. Orderly writing, however, as De Bruyn's study demonstrates, was not an uncomplicated requirement in the scientific search for truth. In fact, in the discourses analyzed by De Bruyn, not only is heterogeneity not contradictory to substance and truth; it is necessary for the intellectually honest discovery of knowledge through induction and observation rather than dogma. By insisting on preserving the text in its heterogeneous, often confusing, state, Capell invites the readers to engage with Shakespeare much as a new scientist would want to engage with the "book of nature": through the direct observation of the diverse phenomena of nature. This, for Capell, is meant as a return to first principles, in particular the principle of respect for the author's intentions. Editors like Pope and Hanmer believed that they were respecting Shakespeare's genius by altering his writings to rid them of

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the barbarous usage of his time. For Capell, however, the surviving texts of Shakespeare reflect his authorial intentions. The difference between Capell and the other editors with respect to their treatment of Shakespearean "nature," much like the difference between Pope and Theobald, is another example of how the powerful common editorial idea that Shakespeare was a site analogous to nature was often given significantly different interpretations when it came to translating that idea into editorial practice.

The Controversy About Notes

Another striking difference between Capell's treatment of Shakespeare and that of the other editors was his insistence on printing his notes in separate volumes from the texts of the plays, instead of combining text and notes on every page of the edition. There is some irony in the fact that even though Capell legitimized the heterogeneity and confusion of the Shakespearean text more than any other editor, he nevertheless produced the most "clean-looking" edition of the eighteenth century. During his decades of Shakespearean work, Capell collected a body of explanatory materials, which he reserved for later publication. He published his Shakespearean commentary in a three-volume series of quartos entitled *Notes and Various Readings to Shakespeare*. The series was published gradually, with the first volume appearing in 1774. The volume contains a seventy-nine page Glossary, in which Capell explains the meaning of obscure words and gives examples of how Shakespeare uses them, as well as notes to nine Shakespearean plays, organized alphabetically: from *All's Well That Ends Well*, to *2 Henry IV*.[8] Capell also provides "Various Readings," in which he lists textual

variations in the different extant versions of the plays. Finally, he provides a list of corrections to his 1768 edition.

The volume failed both commercially and critically. Readers accustomed to seeing text and commentary on the same page not surprisingly found Capell's volumes awkward and impractical to consult. The 1775 *Monthly Review*, critical of the "obscure diligence of Mr. Capel," mocks the publication of the large quarto volume with a Shakespearean analogy: "The awkwardness of huge quarto volumes of notes to a text given in small octavo, and coming like heavy Falstaff so long after the battle, is obvious" (53: 394-95). Disappointed with the negative reception of the fruit of his long labour, Capell recalled the unsold volumes and was reluctant to attempt to publish the remaining two volumes. With the urging of his friends David Garrick as well as John Collins and George Hardinge, however, Capell was persuaded to bring the set to completion by enlisting subscribers for the unpublished volumes. His death on 24 February 1781, however, at the age of sixty-eight, prevented Capell from seeing the publication of the remaining volumes. The project was managed instead by Collins, to whom Capell gave the copyright for *Notes and Various Readings* before he passed away. The publication was delayed by the slow process of recruiting subscribers. In 1779, the first volume was reprinted; in 1780, the second appeared, but the third was published only in 1783. Collins prefaces *Notes and Various Readings* with a Dedicatory Epistle designed to protect Capell's reputation by attacking that of Steevens. Collins accuses Steevens of plagiarizing Capell's materials while pretending to be critical of his editing of Shakespeare.

The second volume of the series features the notes and various readings to the remaining plays not included in the first volume. It also includes a list of "The Plays' Order and Date," as well as "A brief Essay on Verse, as of Shakespeare's modeling; it's Principles, and it's Construction." The third volume, entitled "The School of Shakespeare," contains "authentic Extracts from divers English Books, that were in Print in that Author's Time; evidently shewing from whence his several Fables were taken, and some Parcel of his Dialogue: Also, further Extracts, from the same or like Books, which or contribute to a due Understanding of his Writings, or give Light to the History of his Life, or to the dramatic History of his Time." In other words, the volume is designed to offer an insight into the formation of Shakespeare's language and ideas through an anthology of contemporary Renaissance literature. Capell contends in the Preface that "acquaintance in some degree with the writers of Shakespeare's time and of times prior to him, their merits in point of matter, and the language they had to dress it in, is of the utmost necessity for a right comprehension of *his* language throughout, and right estimate of his merit" (n. pag.). He includes works such as Plutarch's *Lives* , Sidney's *Apology for Poetry*, Spenser's *Fairy Queen* and Holinshed's *Chronicles of England*. Capell also prints "Notitia Dramatica; or Tables of Ancient Plays (from their beginnings to the Restoration of Charles the Second)." He bases this document on a catalogue of Garrick's large Shakespearean library that he had helped to prepare (Stone and Kahrl 176).

The contents of *Notes and Various Readings to Shakespeare* show that Capell shared in Steevens's conviction that the science of editing requires that

Shakespeare's plays be contextualized historically. However, Capell's decision to print these contextual materials separately from the text of the plays was most eccentric, and it indicates differences between his and the other editors' views of Shakespeare. By the time Capell published his edition, the literate men and women of Britain had been accustomed to finding notes, often of extensive length, on virtually every page of their Shakespearean editions. Much as the spectators of Newtonian public experiments expected particular demonstrations of general principles, Shakespeare's readers expected the editors to provide them with concrete, coherent demonstrations of Shakespeare's greatness, not simply with a large body of confusing materials. Although Johnson memorably called notes "a necessary evil," their writing was in fact the primary editorial activity of the eighteenth century, an activity in which Johnson himself was an avid participant.

The production of notes helped to shape editing into a collaborative scholarly enterprise, as the editors corresponded with each other about the illustration of difficult passages and reprinted and discussed each other's notes in their editions. The collaborative spirit of the note-writing enterprise was important for the developing sense of editing as a national scientific project. While Newton himself worked in isolation, Newtonian science in the eighteenth century was a collaborative enterprise that relied on networks and associations. Shakespearean editing also mirrored Newtonian culture in this respect. Much like the many scientific networks that sprang up in the eighteenth century for the purpose of studying nature, the editors—despite their disagreements—in practice

operated as a network dedicated to the illustration and understanding of Shakespeare. In the course of the century, editions of Shakespeare increasingly became compilations of notes, with each editor printing the commentary of previous editors while adding his own to the collaborative effort. Together, editors and other commentators worked inductively for the discovery of Shakespearean truth.

In 1766, in preparation for his and Johnson's edition, Steevens addressed "to the Public" a proposal for a new edition of Shakespeare. His proposal portrays the understanding of Shakespeare as a collaborative project that must incorporate the expertise of many different readers: "there is scarce a reader of Shakespeare but is in possession of some knowledge which another will continue to want; and is able to illustrate from his profession or track of reading what may have escaped the researches of the most industrious commentator." A well-researched edition, Steevens contends, "requires at once the assistance of the Antiquary, the Historian, the Grammarian, and the Poet." He invites members of the public to send materials "without which the task they wish to have well executed can be performed but in an imperfect manner" (Vickers *Critical Heritage* 5: 250-1). The inductive Shakespearean editorial project is not only a specialized professional one, but also a broad public endeavour.

To this "democratic" collaborative note-writing community fostered by Steevens, Johnson and others, Capell was a stranger. He worked in isolation from other editors, and followed eccentric procedures that violated the conventions of his time: transcribing the text from scratch while ignoring the editions of his

immediate predecessors and printing it without notes. The bareness of Capell's edition, a glaring deviation from what readers of Shakespeare had come to expect, is a visual embodiment of his scholarly isolation.

Eccentric as he was, Capell was not alone in resenting the intrusion of notes on the experience of reading Shakespeare. In "Buried Under his Commentators: the Reviewing of Shakespeare Editions in the Eighteenth Century," Antonia Forster documents the mixed attitude of reviewers towards editorial notes.[9] In general, notes were welcome, and acknowledged as instrumental for the illustration of Shakespeare. The *Critical Review*, for instance, responded to the publication of the 1785 Johnson-Steevens edition by investing the writing of notes with a sentiment of national pride: "The nation that can boast of a Shakspeare may be allowed to be enthusiastic in their admiration of his genius, and zealous in their attempts to illustrate his works" (62, 1786: 321). Upon the publication of Malone's edition (an edition which will be the focus of the following chapter), the *British Critic* describes "the eagerness of the public for every able illustration of their favourite" (1, 1793: 55). At the same time, numerous reviews also register fatigue and irritation with notes. "Shall we never rest from these labours?" asks the *Critical Review* of 1785, and responds with rhetorical despair: "We have indeed great reason to think that our repose is still distant . . ." (59, 1785: 342). In 1791, the same *Review* declared that Shakespeare's "beauties are familiar to all, without any comment: and what advantage a commentary on a trifling or absurd passage can afford, we are utterly at a loss to conceive" (ns 3, 1791: 363). A poem in the February 1771 *St. James's*

Chronicle imagines the desperation of Shakespeare himself with the useless

details that, rather than illuminate, conceal the essence of his genius:

> Another Commentator and another,
>
> To choak my Flame with all their Critic Smother!
>
> Ye sacred Nine! from whom I caught the Flame,
>
> Will you permit these Goths to sink my Fame?
>
> Clogg'd with their Load in vain she upward springs,
>
> In vain my Muse would free her limed Wings. . . .

These responses illustrate the persistence of an attitude which Simon Jarvis

describes in relation to the earlier period of the century in *Scholars and*

Gentlemen: Shakespearian Textual Criticism and Representations of Scholarly

Labour, 1725-1765: that "the idea of an application of the techniques of minute

philology to vernacular texts was often taken . . . as a transparently comic one"

(35).

Keeping such responses in mind, one would expect a warm reception from

the public for an edition without commentary. There were, indeed, a few

appreciative responses to Capell's approach. The *English Review* of 1784

commented that while in an edition such as Johnson's the reader "can scarcely

keep his eyes from [the notes], and is frequently drawn into the whirlpool; in spite

of all his efforts," Capell respects his reader's freedom and independence. The

reviewer thanks Capell for having "printed his notes by themselves, not forcing

them upon the student of Shakespeare, but leaving the perusal to his choice"

(*English Review* 3(1784); qtd. in Walsh "Life of Editing" 204). Such positive

responses, however, were the exception rather than the rule, and Capell's work was generally received with hostility.[10] The antiquarian Samuel Pegge depicts Capell as a pedant who "mistook literary industry for genius" and "thought preciseness was a proof of a refined understanding." He criticizes Capell for being "much more busy in comparing Editions than in elucidating his Author," and says that "he is so far rather a Commentator on the old Editions than on the Poet himself; a task hardly worth the pains of a German Grammarian, considering how loosely Shakespeare has been printed in the first impressions" (*Illustrations* 1: 469-70, 476). The *Monthly Review* shows more appreciation than Pegge for textual work, but doubts the value of an accurate text without notes. The reviewer acknowledges "the superior pains" that Capell took in collation, but ultimately dismisses the value of the edition when he asks: "What shall we do with an edition of Shakespeare without notes?" (39, 1768: 274). The arts patron Charles Jennens depicts Capell in the Preface to his 1770 collation-based edition of *Lear* as an eccentric editor who was "greatly mistaken in his ideas of beauty" in preferring "the handsome appearance of a page in black and white, to the quick and easy information of his readers in matters necessary to be known for their becoming proper judges of the sense of the author." The result, according to Jennens, is that Capell's readers are abandoned "in the dark," deprived of the editorial assistance necessary for the understanding of Shakespeare (vii-viii). Steevens joined the chorus against his editorial rival in the Advertisement to his 1773 edition. Refusing to accept a text without notes as a complete editorial product, he writes that "little . . . can be said of a work, to the completion of

which both the commentary and a large proportion of the various readings are as yet wanting."

This criticism provoked a controversy when John Collins responded with a pamphlet, written in 1774 and published in 1777, entitled *A Letter to George Hardinge, Esq., on the Subject of a Passage in Mr. Steevens's Preface to his Impressions of Shakespeare*. Collins comes to his friend's defence by arguing for Capell's superiority as an editor of Shakespeare, and by charging Steevens with plagiarizing from the man whom he mocks. Steevens, for his part, responded by trying to humiliate the clergyman. In future editions, he printed notes on Shakespeare's indecent passages which he signed "Collins" (Vickers *Critical Heritage* 5: 35-6).

If these reviews, combined with the commercial success of the notes-filled editions, are an indication of generally held preferences, then they would suggest that readers' respect and thirst for notes outweighed any desire for a "pure" reading experience. The English public was very receptive to the consumption of mediated knowledge—be it Newtonian general principles as mediated though particular experiment demonstrations or Shakespearean knowledge of human nature as mediated through editorial notes. Indeed, the pastime of satirizing notes did not translate into lack of demand for annotated editions. Readers not only tolerated, but actually expected, a vast apparatus of notes in return for their investment in a multi-volume edition of Shakespeare. An important part of the Tonson marketing strategy, as Marcus Walsh points out, was that the editions were marketed not simply as reprints of the text, but as works of authoritative

scholarship ("Life of Editing" 195). Notes, a feature immediately visible on the page, were valued as products of "authoritative scholarship" more than an accurate text, which requires time, effort and knowledge to judge and appreciate (and which often remains obscure without useful notes). Referring to his thorough treatment of the text, *The Cambridge History of English Literature* states that "scientific criticism of the Shakespearean text begins with Edward Capell" (5: 305). "Scientific" is a loaded term in the context of this dissertation. Most eighteenth-century readers during the time in which Capell wrote would probably disagree with this assessment. For them, an indispensable part of the role of the Shakespearean "scientist" was to study the history, language and background of Shakespeare in order to free his great universal truths from the obscurities of the past. A text without notes was therefore of questionable value to the advancement of Shakespearean knowledge.

The demand for notes draws attention to another connection between Shakespeare and Newton. Much in the same way as Newton's writing inspired an extensive industry of commentary, the public expected the writings of their national poet to be explained and illustrated by the editors. The vast majority of people who familiarized themselves with Newton's ideas did so through the works of commentators: by reading books and articles written about Newton's discoveries rather than the books that he himself wrote. There is an essential similarity between the Newtonian publication industry and the editorial enterprise (in addition to the fact that both were profitable ventures): both were dedicated to illustrating a body of writings that was seen as obscure and confusing, but

nevertheless containing great truths that could be enjoyed after the obscurities were cleared away.

At the same time, the yearning for a Shakespeare free of notes, even if it did not translate into commercial success for Capell, reflects important ideas about readership and authorship that derive from the scientifically inspired conception of Shakespeare as nature. In the second half of the eighteenth century, Shakespeare continues to be viewed not only as a brilliant investigator of nature, but also, metaphorically, as nature itself. The ideal that his writings be read directly without the interruption of notes recalls the idea that "the book of nature" should be studied without the mediation of authority. Capell was not the only editor who valued the experience of reading Shakespeare uninterrupted by commentary. Johnson, after calling notes a necessary evil, advises any reader who is "yet unacquainted with the powers of Shakespeare, and who desires to feel the highest pleasure that the drama can give, read every play from the first scene to the last, with utter negligence of all his commentators." "Let him," Johnson urges, "read on through brightness and obscurity, through integrity and corruption." Only after this unmediated journey through the uneven Shakespearean landscape has been completed should the reader "attempt exactness, and read the commentators" (7: 111). The focus on the feeling of the reader, on the emotional experience of connecting with great poetry unbothered by analysis, was a persistent feature of the "anti-notes" discourse. While notes seek to make the obscurities of Shakespeare accessible through logic and the intellect, the anti-note approach invites the reader to marvel at Shakespeare's

beauties and obscurities alike as one marvels at the diversity of nature. The 1784 *English Review*, which contained one of the few positive reviews of Capell, approves the decision to separate the notes from the text on the grounds that this separation protects the emotional integrity of the reading experience. "The soul of true poetry," the reviewer says, "is enthusiasm" and "the most indispensable quality of dramatic poetry in particular is to touch and captivate the passions. But to be interrupted at every turn with a laborious commentary, and that, as it may happen, at the most interesting and masterly situation in the whole play, is perfect sacrilege to the divinity of the Muses" (*English Review* 3 (1784) 273-275; qtd. in Walsh 236).

To a present-day reader, the emphasis on feeling seems unscientific because modern society has come to associate science with the disinterested study of nature. In the eighteenth century, however, science was by no means dissociated from emotion. Responses to Newton are rich in appeals to the passions. Desaguliers links scientific objectivity with the pleasurable experience of beauty when he asks: "But when the incomparable Sir *Isaac Newton* gives us Facts and Demonstration, instead of Suppositions and Conjectures, how is the Mind charm'd with the Beauty of the System?" (iv). John Conduitt wrote in *Mist's Weekly Journal* of April 1727, after Newton's death, that: "When such great Examples as these are set before us, the Passions are necessarily quickened and excited, and the Soul with a becoming Pride dilates and extends it self, pleased as it were to behold the Dignity of human Nature." He then discusses the "Beauty and Lovelines" of Newton's discoveries and how "when we would look

into the Immensity of the Universe, the Mind starts back at the amazing Prospect .

. . and our Imagination loses it self in the boundless Reflection" (Iliffe 61-62).

These reactions, which are among the many examples of ecstasy over Newton, are

not unlike the above-cited reactions to Shakespeare in their emphasis on the

emotional experience of the person engaging with great discoveries.

In *Science in the Age of Sensibility*, Jessica Riskin powerfully

demonstrates the degree to which the pursuit of natural knowledge in the

eighteenth century was tied to sensibility, to the idea that "knowledge grew not

from sensory experience alone, but from an inseparable combination of sensation

and sentiment." Riskin's focus is on the scientists of the French Enlightenment,

but "sentimental empiricism," the term that she coins, is applicable to the attitudes

that developed in relation to Newton and Shakespeare as well. Her discussion of

how the "persistent appeal to an emotional engagement with nature" encouraged

"intimacy between the natural sciences and the emerging moral sciences" and

provided the "medium for an ongoing interaction . . . between scientific ideas and

social concerns" helps to explain the connection that the editors were able to

make between Shakespeare and Newton, while at the same time maintaining a

focus on emotions that would seem "unscientific" today but did not seem so then

(4, 15, 284, 287).

In "The Individual Reader and the Canonized Text: Shakespeare and

Criticism After Johnson," Jean Marsden explores the growing emphasis on moral

sentiment and on individual feeling in Shakespeare criticism after Johnson. She

associates this focus with a "depreciation of reason" that led to the abandonment

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of "ordered schema" and the disintegration of the text "into smaller and smaller fragments" (62). While it is true that in the period following Johnson there was a growing emphasis on the feelings of the reader, this emphasis should by no means be confused with a collapse of the belief in order. On the contrary, feeling (in addition to rational analysis) became an important vehicle for discovering the general truths that Shakespeare contained.

Throughout the eighteenth century, before as well as after Johnson, the dominant *feeling* remained that Shakespeare was a site of breathtaking and inspiring diversity that nevertheless contained order and general truths subject to discovery using the correct method. In other words, metaphorically, Shakespeare never ceased to be Nature. Epistemologically, the ways of engagement with his writing remained deeply tied to Newtonian discourses about how knowledge about nature is to be gained—through an inductive process of information gathering and through the discovery of underlying principles. By perfecting the inductive historical approach to Shakespeare and the restoration of his text through collation, Steevens and Capell paved the way for Malone's celebrated edition, which was to be the culmination of eighteenth-century editorial undertakings.

[1] My research for this chapter is indebted to my work for the *Eighteenth-Century Literary Scholars and Critics* volume of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* series.

[2] The image of Shakespeare as a discoverer of universal truths continued to be cultivated with vigour during the second half of the eighteenth century, not only within the world of editing. A notable example is William Richardson's *A Philosophical Analysis and Illustration of Some of Shakespeare's Remarkable Characters* (1766), in which the author analyses Shakespeare's characters as representations of truths about human nature and argues that poetry has "the additional merit of conducting us to the temple of truth, by an easier and more agreeably path than that of mere metaphysics" (26).

[3] Theobald also studied the plays in their historical context, but his attitude was exceptional among the editors in the first half of the eighteenth century, and his ideas about Shakespeare do not show the same national emphasis as Capell and Steevens.

[4] Only several years later, between 1774 and 1783, did Capell publish a three-volume commentary on Shakespeare, *Notes and Various Readings*, as a supplement to the edition.

[5] Capell's description of the ray of light that led him to the insight about the authenticity of the quartos recalls—and is perhaps a deliberate allusion to—Theobald's glare of light when he writes that "the attempt to write upon Shakespeare is like going into a large, a spacious, and a splendid Dome thro' the Conveyance of a narrow and obscure Entry. A Glare of Light suddenly breaks upon you beyond what the Avenue at first promise'd . . ." (1: i).

[6] This is a view which Steevens supported when he wrote in his 1766 proposal for his new edition of Shakespeare that "they are strangely mistaken who talk of restoring" the Shakespearean text "to a state in which it never was" (Vickers *Critical Heritage* 5: 252-3).

[7] The primary sources quoted in the following pages are cited from De Bruyn's article.

[8] Alice Walker has noted that Capell was the person who coined the term "Shakespearean" when he wrote in the notes to *All's Well That Ends Well* that the expression "stood necessity'd to help, will appear a strange phrase to the meer modern reader, and may startle even the Shakespearean" (Capell 1: 23; Walker 147-48).

[9] All the reviews quoted in this paragraph are cited from Forster's paper.

[10] Capell's lower status was also reflected in his remuneration for the edition. He was paid £300 for his editing of Shakespeare, less than Theobald (£652), Warburton (£500) or Johnson (£375 for his first edition) (*Literary Anecdotes, volume* 5: 597).

Chapter 3

Edmond Malone and the Scientific Vocation of Editing

The final major Shakespeare edition of the eighteenth century by a single editor, the ten-volume *Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare*, appeared in 1790. Its editor, Edmond Malone, an Irish barrister turned literary scholar, enjoys a privileged place among the ranks of Shakespeare's editors. In the minds of both his contemporaries and many later Shakespeareans, Malone towers above his eighteenth-century Shakespearean colleagues. His special legacy derives from the unrivalled seriousness and comprehensiveness with which he approached the editorial task. More than any other editor, Malone was self-consciously dedicated to making editing a knowledge-seeking science, an endeavour guided by precise standards that separate objective fact from subjective opinion. Malone was driven by a mission not only to produce an accurate text of the plays of Shakespeare, but also to provide his readers with an authentic picture of Shakespeare as a man. He spent years in a painstaking search for any information that he could find about Shakespeare's life. Thus Malone was the first to seriously pursue what since then has become an active branch of scholarship and the subject of popular fascination: the "search for Shakespeare."

Malone's method was documentary research. He was a pioneer of archival work, and spent many years in a restless hunt for primary documents that would reveal new information, or put to the test existing information, about

Shakespeare's life and works. At a time when archival libraries were only beginning to become important destinations for scholars in Britain, Malone, as his biographer Peter Martin notes, made the British Museum library his second home, while also working in other archives across the country. The archival holdings which he investigated included, for instance, Cambridge and Oxford University libraries, the Chancery, the Stamp Office, the diocese of Worcester, the Tower of London, the Remembrancer's Office in the Exchequer, and the office of the Lord Chamberlain (Martin 21, 125). He spent endless hours examining documents such as parish records, wills, birth records, Chancery records and personal letters. The information that he gathered enabled him to augment his editorial apparatus with what were his two major contributions to Shakespearean scholarship: a heavily revised version of the account of Shakespeare's life written by Nicholas Rowe in the beginning of the century (a revision so extensive that Malone's additions exceed in bulk Rowe's original text), and a long historical "Account of the English Stage."

Almost sold out within a year of its publication, Malone's edition was not only commercially successful, but also critically esteemed. Malone was praised for his textual accuracy, and for revealing previously unknown information about Shakespeare. Today, many scholars still speak about Malone in laudatory terms. Marcus Walsh refers to his edition as "Malone's great 1790 Shakespeare" ("Life of Editing" 199), and James M. Osborn, who also uses the term "his great edition of Shakespeare," says that it "was probably the most important sustained work of literary scholarship by one man yet to have appeared in England" ("Malone and

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Oxford" 325). In *Shakespeare Verbatim: The Reproduction of Authenticity and the 1790 Apparatus* (1991), Margreta De Grazia credits Malone with the invention of the modern textual apparatus, with setting the terms according to which Shakespeare has been edited and read for many generations to come. Her study opens with a series of claims about the pioneering nature of Malone's edition:

> It was the first to emphasize the principle of authenticity in treating
>
> Shakespeare's works and the materials relating to them; the first to contain
>
> a dissertation on the linguistic and poetic particularities of Shakespeare's
>
> period; the first to depend on facts in constructing Shakespeare's
>
> biography; the first to include a full chronology for the plays, and the first
>
> to publish, annotate, and canonize the 1609 Sonnets. While it is always
>
> possible to locate adumbrations of these interests in earlier treatments, it is
>
> in this edition that they are first clearly articulated—and articulated
>
> together as an integral textual schema. (2)

Howard Felperin, like De Grazia, emphasizes Malone's "firstness" when he calls him "the foremost exponent of a new historicism." Malone, Felperin explains, differentiated himself from the abstract universalizing tendencies of the eighteenth century because while accepting that Shakespeare "was for all time," he at the same time "reminds us that Shakespeare was also of an age—his own." This kind of "new historicism," Felperin contends, "was indeed 'new'" when Malone published his work, and therefore "Malone has the strongest claim to be

called the founder of modern Shakespeare scholarship as an historical discipline" (8).

Felperin's view of the pioneering nature of Malone's work seems to be based on insufficient familiarity with the work of his editorial predecessors. The idea that Shakespeare was both universal and a product of his own age was clearly present before Malone entered the Shakespearean editorial scene. Steevens's obsessive dedication to studying Shakespeare historically makes it very clear that Malone's historical work was a culmination of trends that developed in the decades preceding his edition, rather than an innovation. Indeed, Malone's work was in many ways the product of a century-long attempt to make the editing of Shakespeare an objective, knowledge-seeking inquiry. This attempt became increasingly historical in orientation and increasingly grounded in the investigation of local details during the second half of the eighteenth century, largely in response to the Newtonian idea that knowledge, in order to be considered true, had to be shown and demonstrated through particulars.

In the Preface to his edition, Malone describes himself as the latest in a line of recent editors dedicated to the discovery of Shakespearean truth. He laments the disrespect for textual accuracy that characterized the early editors of the eighteenth century, most notoriously Pope. In the earlier part of the century, Malone claims, "the text was altered, or amended, as it was called, at pleasure" because for the early editors "to alter Shakespeare's text and to restore it, were considered as synonymous terms." He then describes himself as one of a group of recent, more rigorous editors when he says that "during the last thirty years our

principal employment had been to *restore*, in the true sense of the word" (1: xi).

Malone, then, not only was, but also self-consciously defined himself, as *one* in a line of editors working towards a common goal—the recovery of accurate knowledge about Shakespeare.

And yet, especially when the Newtonian comparison is kept in mind, claims such as those of De Grazia and Felperin about Malone's uniqueness are not without foundation. There was indeed something about Malone that set him apart from the other editors. That difference was not the result of Malone's historical orientation—an orientation which had been a feature of Shakespeare editing at least since Theobald, and was certainly the overriding preoccupation of Steevens. Rather, what made Malone outstanding was the intensity of his drive to discover the truth of Shakespeare. The idea of editing as a truth-seeking science informed the work of all the editors, and was certainly a trenchant feature of their rhetoric throughout the century. Malone, however, took this idea more seriously than any previous editor had and implemented it in a relatively new scholarly territory—the archive. Truth, for him, meant documented, archival truth.

Much like Newton, who surpassed his predecessors while also fulfilling the ideas and methods of the new science that were cultivated by many different individuals over the period of about two centuries, Malone was both a pioneer and an inheritor. The work of both Malone and Newton cannot be understood in isolation from the developments that preceded them. At the same time, both made contributions in their respective fields that significantly surpassed those of their predecessors. It is for this reason that I call Malone "*the* Newton of

Shakespeare" and argue that more than any other eighteenth-century editor, he had claim to that title. More than any other editor, Malone's attitude to his task epitomizes the idea that the editing of Shakespeare can and should be scientific. Even though Malone did not "invent" most of his editorial practices, there is something about the Newton-like dedication and restlessness with which he pursued his work which indeed makes the previous editors seem "faint" in comparison, as if their efforts were mere preparations for his crowning achievement.

When Malone describes himself as one whose "employment" is to restore the Shakespearean text, he intends the word employment most seriously to signify a scientific vocation governed by precise standards and practices. The idea of editing, and of Shakespeare scholarship more broadly, as a professional, all-consuming vocation developed gradually in the decades leading to Malone's edition. Hanmer, for instance, describes his editing in the beginning of his Preface as follows: "One of the great Admirers of this incomparable Author hath made it the amusement of his leisure hours for many years past to look over his writings with a careful eye" (1: 1). "Careful eye" suggests dedication to the truth of Shakespeare. However, for Hanmer, as for many other scholars during his period, the pursuit of Shakespearean truth was a leisure activity to which he dedicated only relatively limited time and resources. This lack of "professionalism" was frowned upon by several prominent Shakespeareans. In *Scholars and Gentlemen: Shakespearian Textual Criticism and Representations of Scholarly Labour, 1725-1765*, Simon Jarvis demonstrates that Theobald's critique

of Pope's work was "prompted by a desire to contest the view that the . . .

gentleman of letters was the best custodian of Shakespeare's text." For Theobald,

an editor should be a professional scholar who is "bound to employ all possible

helps to restoring the text to sense in a way which Pope, the gentleman of letters

turned occasional minute critic, may consider pedantic or unnecessary" (61, 64).

As the century progressed, it was Theobald's approach to editing, not

Pope's, which gained increasing dominance. The development of editing as a

scientific vocation requiring professional dedication from its practitioners

culminated with Malone. Newtonianism, in turn, provided the blueprint for what

it meant to engage in editing as a scientific vocation. During the eighteenth

century, Newton was upheld as the model for how a scientist should work. Like

Shakespeare, Newton was a natural genius. Unlike Shakespeare, however (or at

least unlike Shakespeare as his eighteenth-century editors imagined him), Newton

was also a disciplined thinker who possessed methodological self-consciousness

and was dedicated to setting professional standards for other scientists to follow.

In his own realm, this was exactly who Malone was; he was the Newton of

Shakespeare, role modelling the ideal of editing as a scientific vocation.

Malone the Villain?

As the most rigorous of Shakespeare's eighteenth-century editors, Malone

unsurprisingly has become the central target of the materialist critique of

eighteenth-century Shakespeare editing. Cultural materialists tend to view

Malone in terms opposite to those in which he viewed himself: as a deformer of

Shakespeare instead of a revealer of Shakespearean truth. The most influential

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attack on Malone is Margreta De Grazia's *Shakespeare Verbatim: The Reproduction of Authenticity and the 1790 Apparatus* (1991). For De Grazia, Malone's insistence that all claims about Shakespeare must be based on documentary evidence is a source of distortion and obstruction, which prevents the reader from enjoying a more holistic Shakespearean experience. This is due to the fact that Malone's construction of authenticity does not allow for the consideration of "alternative schemas" (11).

The core of De Grazia's critique is that Malone's obsession with documentary evidence came at the expense of other sources of information, principally, the collective tradition of Shakespeare editing and the oral traditions surrounding it. In De Grazia's view, the consequences of such exclusion amount to substantial loss: "By returning to the original and unmediated documents, bypassing the transmission from generation to generation, Malone lost sight of the successive traditions which formerly endowed the study of Shakespeare with purpose and meaning." Malone, De Grazia contends, attempted to create authenticity in a body of materials which did not lend itself to such stability. Malone pursued the "impossible project of settling in reproduction what was never settled in production" (51, 93). Similarly, Malone's adherence to notions of copyright to exclude texts was misguided, since seventeenth-century production was more "fluid" than that of the eighteenth century. Overall, Malone's edition provided a version of Shakespeare that was seemingly divorced from the process by which his plays first came into the public realm.

The motivation for Malone's concept of authenticity can be found, De

Grazia contends, in his desire to recreate Shakespeare to better fit the bourgeois

sensibilities of late eighteenth-century England. Malone's adherence to the

documentary record sought to establish an "autonomous" Shakespeare,

independent from received traditions. In this way, "the practices applied to

Shakespeare in Malone's edition defined him in terms of the very autonomy that

newly enfranchised the bourgeois subject." It enabled Malone to create a

Shakespeare in the form of the British middle class. The editing apparatus, De

Grazia suggests, "protected Shakespeare from what Malone termed 'modern

sophistications and foreign admixtures', providing a bastion against the forces of

'astonishing' change at home and abroad that threatened to undermine political

and cultural stability." In this way, Malone's method of editing Shakespeare

simply represented his own class's self-interest, to the exclusion of other, equally

valid discourses (7, 10, 184-89).

The same basic idea, that Malone was a violent excluder of alternative

viewpoints, underlies Gary Taylor's much briefer treatment of him in *Reinventing*

Shakespeare. The very premise of Taylor's book, that Shakespeare has been

aggressively reinvented since the Restoration, conflicts with Malone's notion of

an authentic Shakespeare who can be discovered through documentary research.

Referring to Malone's suppression of Ritson's editorial efforts, Taylor writes that

if allowed to progress to completion, an edition prepared by Ritson, despite its

flaws, "might well have created a radical alternative to the conservative tradition

epitomized by Malone" (144-45).

In *Looking for an Argument: Critical Encounters with the New Approaches to the Criticism of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*, Richard Levin warns against the edenic tendencies of materialist criticism, what he calls "the belief—or the need to believe—in some idyllic period of the past from which we strayed away." Edenism is damaging because it is often accompanied by "the belief in a villain who is responsible for the loss of Eden and hence for our present fallen state" (118-20). In the context of eighteenth-century Shakespeare studies, this villain is, clearly, Malone, the most tenacious among the period's editors and the most committed to the idea of objective Shakespearean truth. Ironically, both Malone and materialist critics share an obsession with authenticity, but while he spent years of meticulous research disproving or verifying oral traditions with documentary evidence, their attacks against him are often based on ideologically informed assumptions rather than on knowledge. For instance, when Taylor portrays Ritson as a suppressed revolutionary who could have produced a radical alternative to Malone's edition had he been allowed to thrive, he does so while paying little attention to what Ritson actually writes about Malone and to what he proposes as an alternative.

In *Cursory Criticisms on the Edition of Shakespeare Published by Edmond Malone*, Ritson charges the pedantic Malone with a "total want of *ear* and *judgment*." He describes these as "a natural defect, for which he would be an object rather of pity than of reprehension, if he had not forced himself into an employment for which ear and judgment were essential, and nature, of course, in depriving him of those indispensable requisites, had utterly disqualified him" (vii-

viii). What Ritson advocates as an alternative to Malone is editing guided by taste and aesthetic intuition, the kind of editing practised in the first half of the eighteenth century, most notably by Pope, the kind of editing from which editors such as Theobald, Steevens, Capell and Malone strove to move away. If anything, then, Ritson was a reactionary rather than a revolutionary. There was nothing new in his proposal of taste-based criticism of Shakespeare—only the echoes of a problematic and increasingly discarded older approach. It was Malone, not Ritson, who revolutionized the editing of Shakespeare by insisting that it should be guided by objective standards. His revolution, just like that of Newton in the realm of natural philosophy, was not a single-man act, but the culmination of many years of work by those who preceded him.

The most comprehensive and sustained defence of Malone against the accusations of materialist critics is contained in Peter Martin's biography, *Edmond Malone, Shakespearean Scholar: A Literary Biography.* In addition to being a meticulously detailed account of Malone, Martin's work is also a response to the charges of distortion against his subject. Martin sees no reason to reject the received idea that Malone made major contributions to the study of Shakespeare through archival work. He contrasts the theoretically sophisticated materialist critique of Malone with Malone's "own view" of his work which was "simpler, widely comprehensible in his period, and has remained so ever since among mainstream scholars." Malone, Martin contends, sought "simply to uncover as much truth as he could" by insisting that "nothing old or new could be trusted without documentary support." In response to the accusation that Malone

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recreated Shakespeare in the image of the late eighteenth-century bourgeois

subject, Martin writes that in fact, thanks to Malone's historical research,

Shakespeare's persona and its relationship to its age was never before clearer. In

response to Taylor, Martin writes that "Malone was not 'reinventing'

Shakespeare; he was de-mythologizing him. Facts, not politics, drove his

research," and invention in scholarship was precisely the tendency to which he

was adamantly opposed. What, on the other hand, Malone excelled in was the

"objective discovery of the subjective or private," and his discoveries about

Shakespeare form the basis of what we know about his life to this day (48, 134,

137-38).

Martin's critique is founded on his own close study of Malone's work, as

well as on common sense. He does not provide a historical context for Malone's

search for the "objective discovery of the subjective." The culture of

Newtonianism reinforces Martin's argument that Malone's emphasis on

objectivity was "widely comprehensive in his period," a period in which the

Newtonian-inspired search for knowledge energized the development of editing

as a truth-seeking enterprise. The influence of science on the literary sphere helps

to explain what Martin calls an "Enlightenment zeal for objective truth in the

world of letters" (23). By epitomizing this zeal more than any other editor,

Malone indeed deserves the title "the Newton of Shakespeare." In the following

section, I will demonstrate the connection between Newton and Malone by

engaging in what De Grazia criticizes Malone for doing. I will attempt a brief

biographical examination of the two men.

What can be learned from a comparative survey of the characters Newton and Malone? Materialist critics tend to view individuals as being formed primarily by circumstances, not by deep drives associated with their inner personalities. Their approach does not attempt, to a significant enough extent, to enter the personal mindset, or character, of the individuals examined. Malone, on the other hand, believed that to understand an individual's work (in his case Shakespeare's work), one must peer into the details of that individual's life. It is only through such an inductive examination of particulars that a person's mentality can be understood. Along these lines, I will attempt a brief examination of the details of Newton and Malone's lives in order to better understand what drove them to pursue their respective vocations with such vigour and enthusiasm. In this inductive manner, I will be able to propose that the general principle that propelled both men to their respective careers was not primarily a material one, but rather a principle of character, supported by the culture in which they lived: a strong predisposition to the pursuit of the truth in an objective, scientific manner.

Newton and Malone: a Brief Comparative Biography

Clearly, Newton's and Malone's respective subject matters were very different: the operations of the physical world are quite unlike the life and works of a Renaissance playwright. Nevertheless, there is a fundamental similarity in their ideas about how truth is to be sought after and discovered. Both their approaches were focused on the concept of evidence, on the insistence that every claim made about the subject matter must be based on clear and repeated observation. On January 6, 1672, Newton wrote to Henry Oldenburg that

"whatever is not deduced from . . . phenomena must be called a hypothesis; and hypotheses, whether metaphysical or physical, or based on occult qualities, or mechanical, have no place in experimental philosophy" (*Correspondence* 1: 33). In a letter to Locke on November 14, 1690, he wrote that "there cannot be a better service done to the truth than to purge it of things spurious" (qtd. in Gleick 145).

Separating the spurious from the certain, the subjective from the objective, was precisely Malone's editorial goal. His scholarship was driven by the determination to distinguish what could be known objectively about Shakespeare's life and works from what was simply rumour, oral tradition, wishful thinking or opinion. For his *Life of Shakespeare*, Malone closely re-examined each oral account included in Rowe's *Life* to see whether or not it could be corroborated with archival evidence. When it came to editorial notes, Malone wrote: "It has been long found that very specious emendations do not equally strike all minds with conviction, nor even the same mind at different times" (1: vi). Therefore, emendations that are based on mere imaginative conjecture have no place in the science of editing. Like a scientific demonstration, editing should be governed by standards that are objective and subject to repeated confirmation. His mission was to perfect editing as a truth-seeking endeavour by basing all claims about Shakespeare on documentary evidence, just as Newton based all claims on the systematic observation of nature. Historical documents, for him, were the key to clarifying the ambiguities surrounding Shakespeare and his works.

Their commitment to objectivity is only one of the similarities between Newton and Malone. When their attitudes and work habits are examined side by side, a number of other striking parallels are apparent. Both Newton and Malone were driven to their work by a strong sense of calling that was not in any active way encouraged by their upbringing. Both hailed from backgrounds that made them unlikely to become leaders in their respective fields. Both left unsatisfying careers in which they felt out of place to pursue what they viewed as their true vocation. Newton was born in rural Lincolnshire to the widow of an illiterate farmer (his father died before his birth). His mother intended him to manage the family farm when he grew up, and he therefore received only basic schooling, and was never meant to go to university. When he was sixteen, Newton's mother withdrew him from school so that he would take up the management of the farm. That responsibility was the source of misery for the young scholarly boy, whose negligence and incompetence as a farmer became legendary. William Stukeley, for instance, author of *Memoirs of Sir Isaac Newton's Life*, describes a philosophical Isaac "gazing in serious contemplations, while the sheep & the cows under his care, were strayd into the enclosures & cornfields: which occasion'd great outcry, & damage, to be repaid by his mother" (276). Two years later, when he was eighteen, Newton was rescued from his rural misery with the intervention of his former schoolmaster and of his uncle, the rector William Ayscouth, who convinced his mother to send him to Trinity College, Cambridge. He was admitted to the university as a subsizar, a poor student who earned his

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living by performing menial tasks for a wealthier student. Richard S. Westfall describes the monumental achievement that surprisingly followed:

> In 1660, a provincial boy ate his heart out for the world of learning which he was apparently being denied. By good fortune it had been spread before him. Six years later, with no help beyond the books he had found for himself, he had made himself the foremost mathematician in Europe and the equal of the foremost natural philosopher . . . . In full confidence he could tell the Royal Society early in 1672 that he had made "the oddest if not the most considerable detection which hath hitherto beene made in the operations of Nature." (174)

From a frustrated boy destined for a life in farming, Newton transformed himself into the foremost scientist of the Enlightenment.

Malone's background, while more genteel than that of Newton, also did not make him a probable candidate for the contribution which he went on to make to Shakespeare scholarship. He was born and raised in Ireland, by no means the centre of Shakespeare studies, the son of a wealthy family that wanted him to pursue a career in the law. In 1767, Malone was called to the Irish Bar. Like Newton, he experienced intense dissatisfaction in the occupation into which he was originally directed. Malone, nevertheless, despite his frustration, was more successful as a lawyer than Newton had been as a farmer, and in 1774 was nominated by Trinity College as a parliamentary candidate for the May 1776 elections. On the same year of his nomination, however, Malone's father died. This afforded Malone more financial flexibility to dedicate time to literary

scholarship, while still carrying on with his duties as an attorney. In 1776, his uncle Anthony Malone died and left him an annuity of £1000. This inheritance finally gave Malone the independence to pursue his true passion on a full-time basis, and he permanently abandoned both the law and politics in favour of literary scholarship.

Malone's first literary project was an edition of the writings of Oliver Goldsmith. His skills were noticed by Steevens, who invited him to contribute to the second edition of his and Johnson's Shakespeare, published in 1778. Malone's contribution was a 77-page essay titled *An Attempt to Ascertain the Order in which the Plays attributed to Shakespeare were written*. Two years later, Malone published two supplementary volumes to Johnson's and Steevens's edition, containing miscellaneous observations and notes on the plays, as well as an annotated text of Shakespeare's poems and of the apocryphal plays. These early contributions demonstrate Malone's industrious nature, and his willingness to venture where no other editor had. His chronology was the most serious attempt to that date to determine the dates of the plays. In the Folios, Shakespeare's plays are classified by genre—comedies, histories, tragedies—with no dates supplied. Eighteenth-century editors maintained that classification and, with the exception of Capell, demonstrated little interest in the question of the plays' dates. That changed, however, when Malone entered the Shakespearean scene. For a pioneering effort, Malone's attempt was an impressively successful one. Martin notes that among the thirty-five plays on his list, Malone dated twenty-three within one or two years of the date generally accepted today. (For

the others he was off by three years or more.)[1] To determine the chronology,

Malone relied on details such as dates provided in the Stationers' Register for the

publication of books that Shakespeare appeared to have read before he wrote the

plays, as well as references to known historical events in the plays themselves.

He also worked with the hypothesis that the plays not published in the quarto

format during Shakespeare's lifetime were late ones (Martin 33-34). This was

indeed an impressive and complex exercise for a newcomer to Shakespeare

studies.

Martin observes that "astonishing in an unknown barrister just come from

Ireland is Malone's confidence" (30). While Malone respected his predecessors,

in particular Johnson, he often expressed disagreement with their findings and

opinions, and did not hesitate to pursue projects which they considered too

challenging. In his scholarly self-confidence and in his attitude towards his

predecessors, Malone was much like Newton who prefaced one of his notebooks

in Cambridge with the words "Aristotle is my friend, but truth is my greatest

friend" (Westfall 89). To Malone, Johnson and Steevens were respected—

sometimes revered—colleagues, but just as the writings of Aristotle were not to

be automatically accepted as a perfect reflection of the truth of nature, so the

opinions of celebrated scholars were not to be equated with the truth of

Shakespeare. Like the book of nature, the truth of Shakespeare should be pursued

through the direct study of primary evidence rather than through the mediation of

authority.

What imbued both Newton and Malone with their extraordinary levels of confidence was their professional commitment to discovering the truth about their subject matters. Describing how he searches for knowledge, Newton wrote: "I keep the subject of my inquiry constantly before me, and wait till the first dawning opens gradually, by little and little, into a full and clear light" (*Biographia Britannica* 3241). Malone makes a similar statement in the Preface when he lists the textual duties of an editor, "to exhibit the genuine text of his author, and to explain his obscurities," and writes that "both of these objects have been so constantly before [his] eyes" (1: liv). These parallel descriptions attest to a similar mentality that Newton and Malone shared and to a similar conception of their role in relation to knowledge. Writing to Nathaniel Hawes on 25 May 1694, Newton contrasts the work of "a Vulgar Mechanick" who "can practice what he has been taught or seen done," but will be "at a stand" if he is put out of his familiar path, with that of a true scientist who is dedicated to the discovery of the truth and "is never at rest till he gets over every rub" (Westfall 499). In his Preface, Malone paints a similar contrast between misguided scholars and true scientists of Shakespeare when he characterizes the idea that Shakespeare has been over-studied as a lazy construct. "An idle notion," he says, "has been propagated, that Shakespeare has been *buried under his commentators*; and it has again been repeated by the tasteless and the dull." Like Newton's "Vulgar Mechanick," Malone's "tasteless and dull" Shakespeareans are blind to the potential—indeed to the need—for making new discoveries in their area of inquiry.

Malone would not rest until he had done everything in his power to uncover Shakespearean truth. To him, the idea that there is no further need for scholarship about Shakespeare is profoundly ignorant. His own dedicated study of Shakespeare only made Malone more aware of the potential for new discoveries. "I scarcely remember," he writes, "ever to have looked into a book of the Age of Queen Elizabeth, in which I did not find somewhat that tended to throw a light on these plays." He will tolerate, he says, "no more of this barbarous jargon concerning Shakespeare's having been *elucidated* into *obscurity*, and buried under the load of his commentators" because he is aware of the vastness of the task at hand. He suggests that only "when our poet's entire library shall have been discovered, and the fables of all his plays traced to their original source, when every temporary allusion shall have been pointed out, and every obscurity elucidated, then, and not till then, let the accumulation of notes be complained of" (1: lvi-lvii).

Like Newton, Malone was never idle. He spent the years of his career feverishly collecting information for his work on the life of Shakespeare and on Elizabethan theatre, as well as for textual notes to the plays. Like Newton, Malone was never satisfied that his discoveries about Shakespeare were complete and final. The publication of his edition was postponed more than once because Malone continued to discover new information which he was eager to include. Shortly before he died, Newton wrote that he felt that "the great ocean of truth" still "lay . . . undiscovered before him" (Gleick 4). Like a scientific explorer sailing the seas, possessed with a passion for collecting data from every corner of

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the earth, Malone was determined not to leave any archival stone unturned. His scholarly drive to gather information about Shakespeare's life, travelling to archival destinations across England to obtain it and spending countless hours surveying previously undiscovered documents, was of a piece with the collecting imperative that guided the eighteenth-century scientific vocation. The newly opened British Museum Library and other repositories of information were, to Malone, much like what the "new world" was to natural scientists—an exciting reservoir of data that must be explored by travelling directly to the source.

While these activities may seem standard for a present-day archival scholar, Malone was a pioneer. Before Malone, Shakespearean editors and scholars generally did most of their work from their homes. Malone, however, much like an empirical scientist who had to observe nature directly, would not reach any conclusion without first engaging in primary documentary research. He was one of the first to conduct serious research in the British Museum Library (which opened only in 1753), and in several other now heavily used archival holdings. Malone's tireless efforts yielded two of the most important discoveries in the history of Shakespeare scholarship. In 1789, he discovered the office-book of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels in the reigns of James I and Charles I. His transcription of the office book is most valuable for scholars, as the original was subsequently lost. It provides insight into Elizabethan theatrical practices such as the licensing of plays, the arrangement of costumes and props and court performances. Malone's second discovery, made at Dulwich College, was the diary and account book of the owner of the Rose theatre, Philip Henslowe. These

include information such as records of plays purchased, scenery and props, theatre attendance, admission prices and profits and are regarded as a supremely valuable historical source for research in early-modern stage history. These two findings are an example of how Malone's work continues to be important for the study of Shakespeare's theatre to this day. Like Newton, Malone was tirelessly energized by the potential for new discoveries. On 17 August 1789 he wrote to Thomas Warton, who helped him significantly in his research on the theatre, that he "will not despair of finding Shakespeare's pocketbook some time or other" (BL Add. Ms. 42561, fol. 208v.; qtd. in Martin 126).

In addition to his own independent archival work, Malone also excelled in recruiting others to help him gather information about Shakespeare. Over the course of his career, he established a large scholarly network which consisted, among others, of Charles Burney, Edmund Burke, the Earl of Charlemont, Richard Farmer, John Nichols, Thomas Percy, Isaac Reed, George Steevens, Horace Walpole and Thomas Warton. He was skilled in utilizing the expertise of these and other scholars to assist with his own research. He invited Burney, for instance, to contribute notes about Shakespeare's use of music. More than any other editor, Malone fulfilled Steevens's vision that no single man has privileged access to the truth of Shakespeare and therefore "a perfect edition . . . requires at once the assistance of the Antiquary, the Historian, the Grammarian, and the Poet" (Vickers *Critical Heritage* 5: 250-51). Martin reports that he "constantly" wrote to his contacts, "asking them to ransack libraries, old repositories, and family collections for the elusive fact, date, or name that would lighten the

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quickly darkening pages of literary history" (xv-xvi). He was very persistent in

soliciting assistance—sometimes to the point of rudeness.

One example of Malone's determination in recruiting others to the

Shakespearean project was his correspondence with James Davenport, the Vicar

of Stratford. Davenport was a stranger to Malone when the latter wrote to him in

April 1788 with a request to examine the Stratford Parish Register with the hope

of uncovering useful details about Shakespeare. Malone waited for only two

weeks without receiving a reply before sending Davenport another letter. "I am

sensible," he wrote to the Vicar, "that an entire stranger has no right to intrude on

the leisure of another," but continues "nor should I have ventured to do it on this

occasion, if the information sought had not been for a publick work." After

characterizing the Shakespearean project as a work of public value, Malone

reiterates his queries from the first letter, and even adds a few others. Shortly

afterwards, Davenport returned the desired reply—a long letter filled with

important details. This fruitful exchange led Malone to write nearly forty more

letters with many other queries (Martin 128).

Malone's intense demands on others were a natural extension of the high

standards that he set for himself. Both Malone and Newton drove themselves to

exhaustion, and put their health at risk, in their restless pursuit of knowledge.

They never married and lived solitary lives dedicated to their scholarship. It is

now legendary that when Newton wrote the *Principia*, he hardly ate or slept.

Humphrey Newton remarked about Newton's habits at the time: "So intent, so

serious upon his Studies, y^t he eat very sparingly, nay, ofttimes he forgot to eat at

all, so y^t going into his Chamber, I found his Mess untouch'd of wch when I have

reminded him, [he] would reply, Have I; & then making to ye Table, would eat a

bit or two standing…" (qtd. inWestfall 406). Malone was similarly willing to

deprive himself of the basic necessities of life. On 23 November 1785, Malone

wrote to Warton that Shakespeare "hardly leaves me time for eating, or sleeping"

(BL Add. MS. 42561, fol. 165; qtd. in Martin 112), and he repeatedly complained

that Shakespeare had destroyed his eyesight. No previous Shakespearean editor

had ever gone to the same physical and mental trouble as Malone did in pursuit of

Shakespearean truth.

Newton and Malone were both proud of their achievements. On the one

hand, they were humble with respect to the vastness of their subject matter,

describing their respective contributions as merely drops in the ocean of truth. On

the other hand, they were also aware that they did more than other people to

explore the ocean of truth, and were confident and proud of their findings. While

they both had seemingly endless patience for the respective subjects of their

study, Newton and Malone were highly impatient with people whom they

perceived to be of an inferior commitment to the truth, and they did not hesitate to

lash out spitefully against them. Malone, Martin notes, struck a "note . . . of

extreme self confidence, both in himself and in his methods" that often angered

his contemporaries. He writes that it was Malone's habit to "make enemies by

not suffering fools lightly" (xvii, 140). Indeed, another "talent" which Malone

and Newton shared was that of generating resentment and animosity from fellow

scholars, even as they commanded admiration from them. To a large extent, these

animosities can be attributed to professional jealousy. One example of that phenomenon is Steevens's attitude towards Malone. Initially, Steevens greatly respected Malone for his contributions to his own edition. As Malone's fame rose, however, and threatened that of Steevens, the latter grew envious and began to attack Malone' work.

However, their enviable brilliance was not the only cause for Newton's and Malone's tendency to make enemies. Competitiveness is a part of the scientific vocation, and both men were exceptionally zealous when it came to protecting their achievements, and ruthless in suppressing competing claims. Newton's enemies included Robert Hooke, Leibniz, with whom he had a bitter priority dispute about the discovery of calculus, and John Flamsteed, the first Astronomer Royal. In the draft Preface to his *Historia Britannia Colestis*, Flamsteed portrays Newton as an unethical man and a ruthless opportunist. Newton, Flamsteed indicts, "used [him] as [he] was never used before in [his] life." He claims that every action that Newton took in relation to him was designed either "to gaine the honor of all [his] paines to himselfe" or "to spoyle or sinke" his achievements (28).

In the territory of Shakespeare studies, Malone was similarly autocratic. Gary Taylor notes that he "was personally instrumental in putting down" Joseph Ritson, who in 1783 announced his intention to publish an edition of "The Genuine Text of Shakespeare." Malone, Taylor writes, "moved quickly to squash Ritson's chances . . . . effectively locking him out of the London publishing world" and relegating him "to the role of a vociferous impotent pamphleteer"

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(144). Unsurprisingly, Ritson was full of spite for Malone in his 1792 *Cursory*

Criticisms on the Edition of Shakespeare Published by Edmond Malone, a

pamphlet in which he attacks both Malone's scholarship and his character. "I

have thought proper," Ritson writes, "to make a few observations on some of Mr.

Malone's notes. Now Mr. Malone will take this exceedingly ill; for Mr. Malone

has a very high opinion of himself, and a very mean one of every body else" (vii).

Ritson accuses Malone of conspiring to undermine the success of other

Shakespeareans, while at the same time using their findings in his scholarship.

Ritson was a highly polemic writer notorious for his propensity for exaggeration.

His accusations, therefore, should be taken with a grain of salt. Ritson, however,

was not alone in attacking Malone. The "Newton of Shakespeare" also attracted

criticism from more moderate people whom he irritated and excluded while

paving his access to Shakespearean archival materials. He became especially

notorious for refusing to return to Stratford, despite numerous requests, archival

materials which he had borrowed for his research.

Another notorious instance of Malone's selfishness towards other scholars

is documented in James Caulfield's *An Enquiry Into the Conduct of Edmond*

Malone Esq. Concerning the Manuscript Papers of John Aubrey, a pamphlet

published in 1797. These manuscript papers, stored in the Ashmolean Museum at

Oxford, were of value for Caulfield for use in his work *Memoirs of Remarkable*

Persons. After Caulfield began his work with them, Malone also became

interested in the papers for his Shakespearean biographical research. According

to Caulfield, the competitive and selfish Malone went to great lengths "to exclude

[him] from the advantage [he] might derive by having access to the [papers]." In the middle of his "heavy undertaking," Caulfield reports, he was told "that in consequence of a letter from Mr. Malone to the keeper, Charles Lloyd, Esq. the Manuscripts were no longer to be consulted, particularly, however, excluding me. And the only answer I could obtain from Mr. Lake, the Deputy-Keeper, was, they were carefully locked up, and no longer in his power to shew any person whatever." Caulfield wrote to Malone with the hope of gaining access to the materials, but was ignored. He therefore concludes his pamphlet by agreeing with the scholar George Chalmers that Malone is an unethical scholar with "big bloated pride" (5-6 10, 13, 18).

The survey of the particulars of Newton and Malone reveals that they were driven by a similar general principle: a passion to achieve an objective understanding of their subject matter. From this comparative examination of their character and personal circumstance one can see what is missing from the materialist critique of Malone: an understanding that his approach to Shakespeare was informed by a view of literary editing as a scientific vocation dedicated to the discovery of truths about the past, not by a desire to re-shape Shakespeare in the image of the bourgeois man of the late eighteenth century. Malone excluded materials from the Shakespearean picture because, in his mind, he was not simply telling a story; he was conducting an evidence-based inquiry. The cultural prominence of Newton as a model for the scientific vocation helps to explain why a frustrated lawyer was able to emerge out of "nowhere" and follow his calling to become the foremost Shakespearean scientist of the eighteenth century. The fact

that he shared many personal characteristics with Newton helped Malone to become, and be remembered as, the foremost Shakespearean of the eighteenth century. Malone succeeded because his sense of vocation catered to his culture's desire to discover the truth about the past (deriving from a broader desire to discover the truth about all aspects of reality), not simply to its desire to reshape and appropriate it.

Malone and the "New" Shakespeare

Ironically, while Malone is the most Newton-like of Shakespeare's editors in terms of the seriousness with which he approached the search for Shakespearean truth, the view of Shakespeare that emerges from his findings is less Newton-like than that of the previous editors. By pursuing biography as a primary editorial activity, Malone set himself apart from his predecessors who showed relatively little interest in Shakespeare as an individual man and depicted a more abstract image of him as a transcendental genius. The hallmark of Malone's scholarship was his determination to uncover as much as possible about Shakespeare's life. Although Malone's *Life of Shakespeare* is structured as annotations for Rowe's account, it is much more than a series of annotations. The annotations have a primary role in the *Life*, far exceeding in bulk and in scope Rowe's original text. In 44 out of the *Life*'s 68 pages, the annotations, which are printed in a very small font, cover most or all of the page. Very often, Rowe's words take up no more than two or three lines on the page. As a number of critics have noted, it was only due to publishing deadlines that Malone presented his

extensive research findings as annotations instead of in the form of a stand-alone bibliographical narrative.

Malone's account of Shakespeare's life is noted for its objective, matter-of-fact style and for its extensive examination of minute detail, which can make it quite tedious to read. This tone derives from Malone's conviction that the examination of Shakespeare's life is not simply the telling of a compelling story, but a serious scientific project. His account consists of a microscopic survey of documents and details about Shakespeare's life and of lengthy explanations of the editor's reasoning process in rejecting certain orally transmitted anecdotes as false and accepting others as true. His clear and neutral scholarly tone, a tone much like that expected in scientific writings today, differentiates Malone from the previous editors who, as we have seen, often wrote memorable figurative prose about Shakespeare's genius and his connection to nature. Malone's account is almost bare of this kind of panegyric. His work focuses on the concrete aspects of Shakespeare's life—his family, his house, his finances, his theatrical milieu—and on documents—baptism records, wills, financial accounts, architectural houses—not on metaphoric descriptions of his achievements. Like an empirical natural philosopher, Malone takes his readers through the lengthy inductive process of discovering general facts about Shakespeare's life via the careful examination of particular documentary evidence. Cultural materialists are correct to observe that Shakespeare emerges from Malone's account very much as a bourgeois individual—a man dominated by financial concerns, family responsibilities, and by the theatrical environment in which he worked. This, indeed, is a significant

departure from the largely disembodied and trans-historical image of him as a universal genius who transcended his environment and took his ideas directly from nature.

It is illuminating to compare Malone's account of Shakespeare to biographical accounts of Newton written in the eighteenth century. The interest in Newton's life was a vital aspect of the culture of Newtonianism. The monumental nature of Newton's achievement naturally gave rise to curiosity about his life. When John Arbuthnot discussed Newton's *Principia* with the Marquis del'Hôpital, he reports that the latter expressed a desire to know more about the author of the exceptional book: "He cried out with admiration Good god what a fund of knowledge there is in that book? . . . Does he eat&drink&sleep? Is he like other men?" (qtd. in Gleick 147; qtd. in Westfall 473). James Thomson's "To the memory of Sir Isaac Newton," one of the most famous poems of praise for Newton, includes a plea to people who knew Newton personally to share information about his life:

> Say, ye who best can tell, ye happy few,
>
> Who saw him in the softest lights of life,
>
> All unwithheld, indulging to his friends
>
> The vast unborrow'd treasured of his mind,
>
> Oh, speak the wondrous man! (II:151-155)

Indeed, several important biographical accounts of Newton were written during the course of the eighteenth century. Rob Iliffe's *Early Biographies of Isaac Newton*, a series which includes the first full collection of all the eighteenth-

century sources pertaining to Newton's life and character, describes a flurry of "feverish activity to record, describe, explain and praise Newton's life and works in the immediate wake of his death in March 1727." This resulted in works by Henry Pemberton, Bernard Fontenelle, William Whiston, John Flamsteed, William Stukeley and John Conduitt, all collected in his volumes (xii).

When compared to Malone's account of Shakespeare, the striking characteristic of Newton's biographies is that their writers seem much more prone to hyperbole than is Malone and much more willing to admit oral accounts into their narratives if these accounts serve to highlight Newton's special genius. Biographies of Newton tend to be more celebratory and less factual in tone, and their writers seem to be more concerned with the collection of anecdotes that illuminate their subject in an ideal light than they are with the falsification or authentication of these accounts. Malone's *Life*, therefore, appears more scientific in its tone and method than biographies of Newton.

While Shakespeare emerges from Malone's account as a bourgeois man, Newton emerges from his biographies as a demi-god who stands high above humanity. His biographers' collective message, indeed, is that he was *not* like other men. Conduitt, for instance, beaming with admiration for his subject, refers to him as the "immortal Newton" (64) and writes that his "inestimable Writings . . . seem to be delivered to the World like the sacred Oracles of old, which excluded the Profane and Vulgar, and admitted those only who had been solemnly initiated into the Mysteries of the deity" (62). Malone offers an opposite view of his subject as a man who was dominated by financial interests and catered to the

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tastes of his age. "If Shakespeare," he writes, presents "difficulties above other writers, it is to be imputed to the nature of his work, which required the use of the common colloquial language" (iv). "No other author," he contends, "ever gave up his works to fortune and time with so little care" (1: ii-iii). While Malone describes Shakespeare in the context of his theatrical and social environment, Newton's biographers tend to portray him more often in isolation from society, contemplating universal truths about nature. Henry Pemberton, for instance, writes in *A View of Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophy* that "the first thoughts, which gave rise to his *Principia*, he had, when he retired from Cambridge in 1666 on account of the plague. As he sat alone in a garden, he fell into a speculation on the power of gravity" (144).

Another notable difference between biographical accounts of Newton and Malone's *Life of Shakespeare* is in their treatments of their respective subjects' childhoods. Newton's biographers were fascinated with oral accounts of anecdotes from Newton's childhood that seemed to testify to his special connection to nature and extraordinary mental powers and foreshadow his later scientific achievements. William Stukeley, for instance, describes Newton as a child who, despite the antagonism of "dull boys," dedicated his boyhood to science and experimentation. "Nothing," Stukeley writes, "could induce him to lay by his mechanic experiments: but all holydays & what time the boys had allowed to play, he spent intirely in knocking & hammering in his lodging room, pursuing that strong bent of his inclination." While his schoolmates played in "trifling sports," Newton, Stukeley writes, opted to "play philosophically," on one

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occasion tying a mouse to a model of a mill that he built in order to investigate the

mechanics of motion (72-73). Stukeley augments his account of Newton's

childhood with a report from a Mrs. Vincent who was acquainted with Newton's

mother and reported that as a child Newton "was always a sober, silent, thinking

lad & never was known scarce to play with the boys abroad at their silly

amusements," opting instead to build instruments for experiments. "If his

mother," Vincent recalls, "ordered him into the fields, to look after the sheep, the

corn, or upon any other rural employment, it went on very heavily thro' his

manage. His chief delight was to sit under a tree with a book in his hands or to

busy him self with his knife, in cutting wood for models of somewhat or other that

struck his fancy." Newton's mother, her friend reports, "could not but observe

this. & even the servants would pronounce the lad foolish & say that he would

never be good for anything" (74-76).

The interest of Newton's biographers in their subject's childhood was

related to their view of his genius as a natural gift that manifested itself from his

early days, rather than as a product of education, training or historical

circumstances. A similar view of Shakespeare's genius, and a similar fascination

with his childhood, thrived in the eighteenth century, and was given expression in

many poetic and artistic representations of him. Bellamy and Robarts' 1791

painting "An Infant Shakespeare in the Realms of Fancy" portrays the baby bard

carried by the hand of a Muse into the realm of imagination, while George

Romney's "The infant Shakespeare attended by Nature and the Passions" depicts

a similarly idealized image of his genius as a gift from nature which was present

from his infancy. A poem published in the *Universal Magazine* for 1771, quoted

also in Chapter 2, depicts an image of Shakespeare as Nature's child:

> When Nature to Athens and Rome bid adieu
>
> To Britain the Goddess, with extasy flew;
>
> . . . .
>
> On Avon's fair banks, now the Subject of Fame
>
> She brought forth a boy, and Will Shakespeare his name;
>
> Not egg was to egg more alike, than in feature,
>
> The smiling your rogue to his parent, dame Nature. (XLVIII (1771), 97-8;
>
> qtd. in Babcock 119)

Another depiction of Shakespeare as the child of Nature appears in *The*

Enthusiast: or the Lover of Nature (1744), a poem by Joseph Warton. Nature, in

Warton's description, lovingly nurtured Shakespeare to develop his artistic talent:

> as with Honey gather's from the Rock,
>
> She fed the little Prattler, and with Songs
>
> Oft sooth'd his wond'ring Ears, with deep Delight
>
> On her soft Lap he sat, and caught the Sounds. (13)

Despite these idealized popular portrayals circulating during his time, Malone

wrote almost nothing about Shakespeare's childhood, simply because he was not

able to find substantial authenticated information about it. Malone does invoke

the image of Shakespeare as a child protected by the Muses when he talks about

the impact of the plague on the inhabitants of Stratford. "The plague," he writes,

"in the last six months of the year 1564 carried off more than a seventh part of

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them." However, "fortunately for mankind it did not reach the house in which the infant Shakespeare lay; for not one of that name appears in the dead list.—May we suppose, that, like Horace, he lay secure and fearless in the midst of contagion and death, protected by the Muses to whom his future life was to be devoted" (124). This, however, is the only romanticized description of Shakespeare's childhood which Malone allows into his otherwise factual, document-based account.

While not typical of his style, the description of Shakespeare as a baby protected by the Muses exemplifies an important point about Malone's view of Shakespeare: that his insistence on documentary evidence and his tendency to describe Shakespeare as a man, not a supernatural creature, was by no means a rejection of the idea that Shakespeare was a universal genius with a special connection to nature. The idea of Shakespeare's universality and of his extraordinary understanding of nature was universally shared by Shakespeare's editors throughout the eighteenth century, and Malone was no exception. Malone rejected conjecture about Shakespeare's life, but he did not reject the view that Shakespeare was an extraordinary person. Even as Malone does not engage in metaphoric descriptions of Shakespeare's genius but focuses instead on the facts of his life, he certainly believes in Shakespeare's exceptional talent and worth. That superiority, indeed, is what provided the reason for him to study Shakespeare's life in such detail. Even as the vast bulk of his *Life* is dedicated to a minute examination of biographical information, Malone does include some hyperbolic references to the "bent of [Shakespeare's] great genius" and to

Shakespeare as England's "brightest ornament," as "our great poet" and "our incomparable poet" (123-24). An example that reveals Malone's admiration for Shakespeare's genius is his discussion of the mulberry tree that Shakespeare reportedly planted in his house. After examining evidence in his customary factual style that the tree was indeed planted by Shakespeare, evidence which included botanical information about when that tree species arrived in England, Malone uncharacteristically changes his tone to a more emotional one. He invites his readers to wish with him that the tree and the garden in which it is planted "may enjoy perpetual verdure and fertility." He even continues with a poem that celebrates Shakespeare as at once an English hero and a universal, godlike genius:

> In this retreat our Shakespeare's godlike mind
>
> With matchless skill survey'd all human kind.
>
> Here may each sweet that blest Arabia knows,
>
> Flowers of all hue, and without thorn the rose,
>
> To latest time, their balmy odours fling,
>
> And Nature here display eternal spring! (119).

In addition to this verse, Malone augments his edition with a collection of "Ancient and Modern Commendatory Verses on Shakespeare." Eighteenth-century editors generally printed only the Folio prefatory poems in their apparati, but Malone adds to these more recent poems that exemplify his period's views of the universality of Shakespeare's genius. Three examples include Fenton's "Epistle to Southerne" which praises "Shakespeare, the genius of our isle, whose mind (the universal mirror of mankind),/Express'd all images," Lloyd's

"Shakespeare, a Poem" which laments: "Oh, where's the bard, who at one view/Could look the whole creation through," and Charles Churchill's *The Rosciad* that describes Shakespeare as a genius with unusual penetration into nature: "Things of the noblest kind his genius drew,/ and look'd through nature at a single view" (1: 227).

Clearly, then Malone never loses sight of the idea of Shakespeare as a universal genius and does not question his trans-historical significance. He endorses Newton-like descriptions of him, even as he generally does not develop them in his own words. His biographical findings about Shakespeare as a man are intended to co-exist side by side with and to augment, not to exclude, the view of him as a universal genius. Indeed, on a basic level, Malone's Shakespearean scholarship is energized by the idea that he is a genius of universal significance and therefore should be studied inductively in minute detail. At the same time, however, Malone's documentary research did transform the image of Shakespeare, encouraging readers to think about him as an individual, not simply a disembodied genius, and as a theatre practitioner. For editors working before Malone, as I have demonstrated in previous chapters, the theatre was the major source of corruption of Shakespeare's genius. Pope wrote that "Players are just such judges of what is right, as Taylors are of what is graceful" and that consequently "most of [Shakespeare's] faults are less to be ascribed to his wrong judgment as a Poet, than to his right judgment as a Player" (1: vii-viii). Pope and his fellow early editors viewed Shakespeare as a poet and showed relatively little interest in learning about the conditions of the Elizabethan stage.

Malone, however, dedicated to objective facts, could not ignore the theatre

as an essential aspect of Shakespeare's identity. In addition to his account of

Shakespeare's life, Malone wrote a 331-page account of the history of the English

stage. He discusses subjects such as the management of the theatres and the

conditions of playing and provides profiles of actors. He also includes a carefully

documented description of Shakespeare's theatre. Malone's history of the stage

was the most comprehensive work on the subject written to that date. Edmund

Burke, in a 1790 letter to Malone, praises the work as an important contribution

not only to the study of stage history, but also to the study of human nature:

> An History of the Stage is no trivial thing to those who wish to study
>
> Human nature in all Shapes and positions. It is of all things the most
>
> instructive, to see, not only the reflection of manners and Characters at
>
> several periods, but the modes of making this reflection, and the manner of
>
> adapting it, at those periods, to the Taste and disposition of mankind. The
>
> Stage indeed may be considered as the Republick of active Literature; and
>
> its History as the History of that State. (*Correspondence of Burke* 6: 181)

Burke's comments demonstrate a radical difference from earlier eighteenth-

century attitudes which did not view the stage as an essential aspect of

Shakespeare's contribution to the study of human nature. Of all the eighteenth-

century editors, Malone was the most inclusive in his attitude towards the stage.

Of all the eighteenth-century editorial descriptions of Shakespeare, his comes

closest to the view of him that is presented in the Folio prefatory materials, a view

examined in the first chapter of this dissertation. Just as Malone ushered in a new

image of Shakespeare, he at the same time revived the Folios' picture of him as an individual human being and as a man of the theatre.

Eighteenth-century editors tended to look down on the Folio descriptions of Shakespeare as the writings of uneducated players. Malone, however, was more willing than any other editor to defend the Folio descriptions of Shakespeare as accurate, thus reintegrating what his predecessors rejected. For instance, he defends as probable the famous claim in the Folio Preface that Shakespeare scarcely blotted out a line, a claim rejected by Pope and others (1: 140-41). Malone's accommodating attitude towards the Folios draws attention to an important irony in the cultural materialist critique of him as an aggressive distorter and excluder. De Grazia's claim that Malone's introduction of "an external authority by which true and false could be positively determined" led to the arbitrary rejection of "contributions which had been received and passed down over the generations linking his period to Shakespeare's" (*Shakespeare Verbatim* 50-51) seems less convincing in light of the fact that Malone was more willing than any previous eighteenth-century editor to accept the more theatrical and more personal seventeenth-century image of Shakespeare.

Far from a distorter and an excluder, Malone was rather an integrator. His edition merges the trans-historical view of Shakespeare as a universal genius and an investigator of human nature that was developed during the eighteenth century with a Folio-like (though much more rigorously documented) view of him as an individual and a theatre practitioner. This, precisely the opposite of what materialist critics charge him with, was perhaps Malone's greatest contribution:

that by practising editing as a scientific vocation he was willing to admit into his account any piece of information about his subject, regardless of its ideological origin. He had only one important requirement—entirely reasonable within a truth-seeking community—that every detail accepted into an account of Shakespeare be corroborated with evidence.

[1] Malone's revision of the chronology for his 1790 edition was more accurate for seven plays (Martin 34).

Chapter 4

Looking for "Newtonian" Laws in Shakespeare: The Mystifying Case of the Character of Hamlet

Writing in the column "Dramatic Strictures" in the *St. James's Chronicle* between 21-4 December 1771 and 3-5 March 1772 using the pseudonym *Hic et Ubique*, George Steevens delivered a sustained attack on the much-loved play from which he borrowed his pen name. The focus of his critique was the disturbing moral and aesthetic heterogeneity of *Hamlet* and its profoundly flawed title character. *Hamlet*, for Steevens, is at once an "instance of the noblest Exertion of Dramatic Powers, and the greatest Abuse of them" because while the play provides "Proofs of . . . genius" that exceed those of all writers and ages, it also "sinks into Buffoonery" after the second act. Steevens blames this deterioration on the enigmatic character of Hamlet who, in his eyes, inexplicably transforms from "a most exquisite Dramatic Character, young, warm, full of grief for his Father's Death, and fuller of Resentment at his Mother's Marriage" into a procrastinator who "goes on from Act to Act playing the Fool . . . always *talking*, *threatening*, but never *executing*." After exhibiting great powers in the first two Acts, Shakespeare's supreme genius, Steevens caustically remarks, "had wanted rest, fall'n asleep, and dreamt of going to England, coming back, Churchyards, Graves, Burials, Fencing Trials, Poison, Stabbing, and Death" (Vickers *Critical Heritage* 5: 445-48). Steevens's erratic, disjointed list imitates what in his view is

the disintegration of the character of Hamlet from a noble avenger to an impotent, annoying, verbose fool with immoral tendencies.

Steevens was not alone among Shakespeare's eighteenth-century editors in responding with dismay to the character of Hamlet. *Hamlet* was one of the most popular plays in eighteenth-century England, both on the page and on the stage, and was therefore the recipient of extensive editorial attention. For instance, in *Shakespeare Restored*, Theobald's 1726 response to Pope's edition, most of the textual examples are taken from *Hamlet*. Theobald certainly recognizes the play's special status when he writes in the Introduction to *Shakespeare Restored* that "it is, perhaps, the best known, and one of the most favourite Plays of our Author: For these thirty Years last past, I believe, not a Season has elaps'd, in which it has not been perform'd on the stage more than once" (vii). Along with Falstaff and Macbeth, the character of Hamlet exercised special powers of fascination over the imaginations of eighteenth-century readers and spectators.

On the one hand, Hamlet was an admired character—respected for his intellectual depth, sensitivity and moral sense. Eighteenth-century critics, however, were upset by the delay in Hamlet's revenge and especially by that delay's moral and aesthetic consequences for the development of the play. Commentaries from the period are filled with complaints about the inconsistencies and absurdities created by Hamlet's often apparently random behaviour. Johnson, for instance, wrote that Hamlet's pretended madness lacks an "adequate cause" because it achieves nothing which the hero "might not have done with the reputation of sanity" and causes much unnecessary pain and

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damage to other characters. In particular, Johnson, like many other fellow commentators, was appalled by Hamlet's treating of Ophelia with "useless and wanton cruelty," a treatment that is entirely unnecessary for his revenge and that casts heavy doubt on the nobility of his character (*Yale Johnson* 8: 1011).[1]

It is no wonder that the editors were so disturbed by the heterogeneous, often self-contradictory, character of Hamlet. After all, if the science of editing in the eighteenth century could be summed up in one central idea, then this organizing idea would be the search for underlying principles that explain human behaviour. The editors viewed the Shakespearean canon as a diverse body of confusing phenomena, a place analogous to nature that nevertheless embodied Shakespeare's understanding of the principles of human nature. These principles were contained in Shakespeare's remarkable characters. Johnson expressed a widely shared and influential sentiment when he wrote in his Preface that "Shakespeare always makes nature predominate over accident," and "preserves the essential character" of each person represented in his drama (65). In other words, the actions of each of his characters can be explained by a dominant underlying trait that is to be regarded as the "law" of that character. That "law" guarantees what George Stubbes calls the "constant Conformity of each Character to it self from its very first setting out in the Play, quite to the End" (2). Writing under the pseudonym *Longinus* in the *General Evening Post of* 1-2 January 1772, Steevens argues in the same vein that even though Shakespeare has often produced incoherent plots, "he is always particularly happy in the preservation of his *Character*, and never represents the same person in an inconsistent point of

view to the readers" (Vickers *Critical Heritage* 5: 487). Like objects in nature that are inviolably governed by the laws that Newton discovered, the behaviour of Shakespeare's characters can be explained coherently and consistently by the general principles that Shakespeare derived inductively through his observations of the human realm.

The editors routinely criticize Shakespeare for producing flawed plots and for creating settings that do not conform to historical, cultural and geographical realities. For instance, Steevens writes that "Shakespeare, apparently through ignorance, makes Roman Catholicks of [the] Pagan Danes" in *Hamlet* (10: 217), and Malone criticizes him for introducing the University of Wittenberg, an institution which was not founded until 1502, after the period in which the play presumably takes place (9: 202). Editorial notes for all of Shakespeare's plays are filled with similar complaints about incongruities with respect to setting, plot, and the like. When it comes to character, however, the editors emphasize and praise Shakespeare's remarkable consistency.

In the Prefaces, the editors speak about Shakespeare's understanding of humanity in general strokes, typically without demonstrating their praise with particular case studies. In *Johnson's Critical Presence*, Philip Smallwood notes that Johnson's criticism of Shakespeare in the Preface presents "much detailed and diverse material in exceptionally general terms." This generality, however, Smallwood contends, cannot be dismissed as shallow, for in his notes Johnson records his detailed reactions to Shakespeare "word by word, line by line, speech by speech, and play by play" (47-48). Indeed, the editorial apparatus of notes

provides a venue for the editors to demonstrate Shakespeare's understanding of human nature with reference to specific characters. When analyzing a character, the editors typically describe his or her behaviour and then identify an underlying principle that would explain that behaviour. Once an underlying principle is identified, incoherence and confusion transform into cogent understanding. Not only does the play become easier to comprehend; since Shakespeare's characters are drawn from the real world and represent phenomena actually found in nature, the underlying principles that the editors identify in these characters can in turn be applied to the study of humanity in the real world.

For instance, when commenting on Claudius's reaction to the play which Hamlet stages in Act Three, Scene Two in order to "catch" the king's conscience, Capell highlights Claudius's prayer as an example of Shakespeare's perfect understanding of the operation of guilt: "the soul of this wretched man is endeavouring, as sin always does, to impose upon itself." The words "as sin always does" highlight Capell's view that in Claudius, Shakespeare represents guilt as a universal phenomenon. Commenting on Claudius's "amazingly forcible" exclamation, "Try what repentance can. What can it not?/Yet what can it when one cannot repent?/O wretched state! O bosom black as death!" (3.3.65-67),[2] Capell says that the "utmost effort of genius" could not represent the operations of a guilty mind "better than is done" in these lines (1: 139).[3] This is Shakespeare at his best, applying his knowledge of human nature to the construction of a character which in turn can be used to study the phenomenon of guilt.

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Another favourite editorial example of Shakespeare's exceptional understanding of human nature and of his ability to apply it to the construction of character was Polonius. Warburton writes that Polonius is a perfect specimen of a "weak, pedant minister of state." He is not sufficiently insightful to be the author of the "fine lessons of social life" which he preaches, but is nevertheless "pedant enough to have met with them in his reading, and "fop enough to get them by heart, and retail them for his own." The details of Polonius's characterization demonstrate, Warburton contends, that Shakespeare "excels in nothing more than in the preservation of his characters" because Polonius's underlying nature as a pedant manifests itself consistently in every one of his interactions with other characters (8: 161). For instance, in the course of instructing Reynoldo to spy on Laertes in France, Polonius at one point loses his train of thought and pleads with his servant to remind him of his meaning: "what was I about to say? By the mass, I was about to say something. Where did I leave?" Reynoldo, in response, recalls the last words that his master spoke: "At 'closes in the consequence', at 'friend, or so', and 'gentleman'." This rather confusing reminder suffices to put Polonius right back on track to completing his long-winded instructions (2.1.49-52). This, for Warburton, exemplifies Shakespeare's precise understanding of the operations of an unoriginal, pedantic mind. The words of Reynoldo's reminder, Warburton explains, communicate "no particular idea of the subject he was upon" and therefore could not have reminded Polonius of the true substance of his speech. This is Shakespeare's way of dramatizing the fact that Polonius's intellectual essence is not one of true understanding, but of rote. His discourse, Warburton

says, is simply "words got by heart which he was repeating" and yet another "extraordinary instance" of Shakespeare's "attention to the preservation of Character" (8: 161).

Johnson similarly argues that Polonius is an example of Shakespeare's ability to understand the underlying principle by which an individual human being operates. The editor is puzzled by the "seeming inconsistency of so much wisdom with so much folly" in one character, but insists that the incongruity is only "seeming." He then proceeds to identify the underlying principle that would unify and explain the phenomenon of Polonius. In Polonius, Johnson writes, Shakespeare painted the picture of a man who is "bred in courts, exercised in business, stored with observation, confident of his knowledge, proud of his eloquence" but who is ultimately superficial and is "declining into dotage." The wisdom that Polonius imparts is not his own, but is simply memorized knowledge. In response to Polonius's inaccurate but confidently expressed explanation of Hamlet's madness in Act Two, Scene Two, Johnson writes that Polonius represents a man who "excels in general principles, but fails in the particular application." In other words, Polonius is not a good empirical thinker. "General principles," in this context, does not mean Newtonian general principles reached through careful induction. On the contrary, Johnson charges Polonius with dogmatism because he "depends upon his memory" for generalities and only "draw[s] from his repositories of knowledge" instead of observing reality directly and independently as a true scientist of human nature would. Johnson speaks about Polonius's character in terms of a single underlying principle when he

writes that "this idea of dotage encroaching upon wisdom, will solve all the

phenomena of the character of Polonius" (974). This exactly was the aim of

Newtonianism: to identify underlying principles that provide unifying

explanations for diverse and often apparently contradictory phenomena. When

the editors identify such a principle in relation to a Shakespearean character, they

succeed in their role as the Newtons of Shakespeare.

It is for this reason that Hamlet frustrated eighteenth-century

Shakespeareans beyond measure: they were not able to identify an underlying

principle that would explain his often contradictory and erratic behaviour.

Writing in the *Mirror* for 17 April 1780, Henry Mackenzie observed that "of all

the characters of Shakespeare that of Hamlet has been generally thought the most

difficult to be reduced to any fixed or settled principle" (Vickers *Critical Heritage*

6: 273). To this day, Hamlet, probably the most performed and studied

Shakespearean character, continues to mystify readers who ask themselves what

kind of person this melancholy prince is. In *Shakespeare is Hard, but so is Life:*

A Radical Guide to Shakespearean Tragedy, Fintan O'Toole summarizes the

contradictory impressions that tantalize readers of the play:

> Hamlet is a slob, a shirker. He has a job to do and won't do it. He keeps
>
> persuading himself that there is a good reason for not getting on with the
>
> job in hand. He is certainly unwell and possibly evil. The problem of
>
> *Hamlet* is Hamlet. Hamlet is there to teach us a lesson: when faced with a
>
> difficult and unpalatable task, we must stiffen our upper lips, put our

consciences in the deep freeze, and get on with it. Otherwise, we will

come to a bad end.

      Alternatively: yes, Hamlet is guilty of delay and indecision, but

this is a flaw in an essentially noble nature. He is a melancholy

intellectual in black tights, leaning up against a headstone with a skull in

his hand. The play happens not in the castle of Elsinore but in the soul of

Hamlet. It is a beautiful soul, far too beautiful to be defouled with

something as vulgar as action. (34)

While O'Toole himself warns against the tendency to think about Hamlet in terms

of an essential nature, his colourful summary provides vivid testimony to the

persistence of the questions that agitated Shakespeare's eighteenth-century

editors: What is Hamlet's true essence? Is there a unifying underlying principle

that can explain his behaviour?

Is There Method in Hamlet's Character?

      The reason for the intensity of the editors' ultimate frustration with

Hamlet was that initially, they found him to be admirable. The esteem for Hamlet

focused on his conversation with the ghost of his dead father in Act One, Scene

Five, an exchange that ends in Hamlet's determination to execute revenge against

his uncle. Hamlet, in this scene, appears as a man of action, and the editors

respected both his moral resolve and the language with which he expressed it.

Among the lines that generated particular appreciation were those in which

Hamlet urges the ghost to reveal the truth about the murder: "Haste, haste me to

know it, that I, with wings as swift/As meditation or the thoughts of love,/May

sweep to my revenge" (1.5.29-31). Warburton writes that "[t]his similitude is extremely beautiful." The beauty, for him, is both aesthetic and moral. He explains that "meditation" is "consecrated, by the *mystics*, to signify that stretch and flight of mind which aspires to the enjoyment of the supreme good," and therefore Shakespeare's word is perfectly chosen to reflect Hamlet's moral sentiment (8: 146).

Those parts of the play in which the editors found Hamlet's conduct to be morally worthy tended to receive much emendatory attention. The editors, it appears, attempted to make the "good parts" of *Hamlet* as textually perfect as possible, so that their polish would match their moral value. This resulted in many emendations which were ultimately deemed unnecessary from a textual view point by later editors. Theobald, for instance, suggests replacing "sweep to my revenge" with "swoop to my revenge." To support the emendation, he reminds the readers that when MacDuff in *Macbeth* laments the massacre of his household, he uses the words "at one fell Swoop" (*Shakespeare Restored* 51-52). Thus Theobald links Hamlet with another loved character whom Shakespeare's readers associate with grief caused by great injustice.

Other emendations to the "noble" parts of *Hamlet* included, for instance, Theobald's suggestion to replace "beteem" with "beteene" in "that he might not beteem the winds of heaven/visit her face too roughly" (1.2.143-44; Theobald 7: 237). This emendation, accepted throughout the eighteenth century, was ultimately rejected by Malone. Malone discarded the emendation after consulting Golding's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and learning from his reading of

that translation that "beteeme" was a word used during Shakespeare's time.

Another misinformed emendation that Malone discarded was Theobald's

emendation of "mole of nature" to "mould of nature" in Hamlet's description of

drinking in Denmark. Theobald's emendation was motivated by the belief that

the word mole did not carry the negative connotations that Shakespeare intended

(*Shakespeare Restored* 33-34). Malone, however, cites a description from *King

John*, "patch'd with foul *moles* and eye-offending marks," to demonstrate that in

fact the word mole does resonate negatively in the Shakespearean canon and

should therefore not be changed in *Hamlet* (220). Three final examples of

emendations suggested and then discarded are Warburton's proposal to replace

"death" with "earth" in "Why thy canoniz'd bones, hearsed in earth,/Have burst

their cearments?" (1.4.26), an emendation rejected by Johnson (8: 142); Hanmer's

suggestion to replace "sea of troubles" with "assailing troubles" in "to suffer/The

slings of arrows of outrageous fortunes/ Or take arms against a sea of

troubles,/And by opposing end them?" (3.3.58-61; Hanmer 6: 370); and Pope's

suggestion to replace "sea" with "siege" in the same passage. These lines are a

part of Hamlet's famous "to be or not to be" soliloquy in Act Three, Scene One,

among the most respected pieces of Shakespearean poetry in the eighteenth

century and after. Pope seeks to make these lines as poetically perfect as possible

by developing the military imagery which Hamlet introduces with slings and

arrows. Theobald, however, deems the change unnecessary, and points out that

by following the explicit military imagery with a reference to the sea,

Shakespeare may be alluding to the sea as a metaphor for an army in *Jeremiah* 51.42: "The sea is come up upon Babylon" (*Shakespeare Restored* 82-83).

Hamlet's "to be or not to be" soliloquy was the subject of considerable editorial attention in the eighteenth century. Johnson's commentary on the soliloquy is a perfect example of the high value that the editors placed on reason and coherence in their analysis of the character of Hamlet. Johnson begins by painting a Shakespeare-like image of Hamlet (Shakespeare-like, that is, when the eighteenth-century image of Shakespeare is used as a reference frame) as a person who thinks precisely, but whose words do not always match the greatness of his understanding. The "celebrated soliloquy," Johnson writes, consists of words "bursting from a man distracted with contrariety of desires, and overwhelmed with the magnitude of his own purposes." As such, much like the poetry that flew out of Shakespeare's mind, it is "connected rather in the speaker's mind, than on his tongue." Johnson's goal is to "endeavour to discover the train" of Hamlet's reasoning "and to shew how one sentiment produces another" (8: 981).

The concept of a "train of thought," or "train of reasoning" played an important role in Newtonian thinking about human nature. Eighteenth-century philosophers were fascinated by the possibility of tracing the connections between thoughts, and explaining how one idea produces another in the human mind. Their investigations of this process were often influenced by Newton's work. For instance, David Hume tried to explain how the mind moves from one idea to the next by using Newton's laws as his model. He believed that association between ideas in the human mind functioned much like gravitation in the physical world,

and therefore formulated three laws of association, mirroring Newton's three laws of motion in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1: 26-31). By approaching Hamlet with an eye to chart the train of his ideas, Johnson brings a Newtonian turn of mind to the text.

For example, after Polonius prepares Ophelia for an encounter with Hamlet by instructing her to read a book of devotion, Hamlet enters the stage and reflects on his options:

> To be, or not be to—that is the question:
>
> Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
>
> The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
>
> Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
>
> And by opposing end them? (3.1.57-61)

Johnson explains Hamlet's reasoning process in these five lines as follows:

> Hamlet, knowing himself injured in the most enormous and atrocious degree, and seeing no means of redress, but such as must expose him to the extremity of hazard, meditates on his situation in this manner: "Before I can form any rational scheme of action under this pressure of distress," it is necessary to decide, whether, "after our present state, we are *to be or not to be.*" That is the question, which, as it shall be answered, will determine, "whether 'tis nobler," and more suitable to the dignity of reason, "to suffer the outrages of fortune" patiently, or to take arms against "them," and by opposing end them, "though perhaps" with the loss of life. (981)

In Johnson's analysis, Hamlet is not contemplating the possibility of suicide. Rather, the deliberate and philosophical young man feels that he must resolve whether or not there is life after death before embarking on a potentially fatal mission. Hamlet, for Johnson, is motivated by a desire to act under a "rational scheme of action." His tendency to think and act logically is an essential aspect of his character. Malone later pointed out Johnson's basic error, since Hamlet is in this speech in fact contemplating the possibility of suicide. Otherwise, Malone says, Johnson "marked out with his usual accuracy" the train of Hamlet's reasoning (9: 286-87). Accuracy and precision of thinking are here upheld as a noble principle that applies to both character and editor.

Indeed, the editors were not so bothered by Hamlet's lack of action as long as he is able to reflect about his situation in rational, philosophically coherent, terms. Viewing Hamlet as a philosopher with a good understanding of human nature, the editors proceed to show how he is able to utilize this understanding to advance his moral goals. For example, when Hamlet tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who he knows have been appointed to spy on him, that he understands why they were sent for, he provides a compelling articulation of a depressive state:

> I have of late—but wherefore I know not—lost all my mirth, forgone all
>
> custom of exercise; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that
>
> this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory. This most
>
> excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erchanging firmament,
>
> this majestical roof fretted with golden fire—why, it appears no other

thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. (2.2.293-301)

This description, which reduces the glories of nature to images of illness and decay, is, for Warburton, "an admirable description of a rooted melancholy sprung from thickness of blood." Hamlet, Warburton contends, "artfully" constructs this description in order "to hide the true cause of his disorder from the penetration of these two friends, who were set over him as spies" (8: 170). The hero's understanding of human nature, then, has practical significance to advancing the course of his revenge. Hamlet uses it strategically to confuse the mission of the spying pair so that he may achieve his own mission—avenging his father's death.

A good example of the editors' determination to find method and strategy in Hamlet's apparent madness is Warburton's treatment of his enigmatic words to Polonius: "For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog,/Being a good kissing carrion—/Have you a daughter? (2.2.181-83)." From talking about the corruption of the world and the scarcity of honest people, Hamlet abruptly breaks off to ask about Ophelia without completing his former train of thought. The fact that Hamlet counterfeits madness, for Warburton, is no excuse for the editors to simply put "any nonsense into his mouth." With this in mind, he proposes an emendation, which was later enthusiastically endorsed by Johnson. The "strange passage," Warburton contends, "when set right, will be seen to contain as great and sublime a reflexion as any the poet puts into his Hero's mouth throughout the whole play."

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To set the lines in order, Warburton suggests changing "being a good kissing carrion" to "being a god, kissing carrion." He explains Hamlet's "chain of ideas" as follows: after saying that "*to be honest, as this world goes, is to be one picked out of ten thousand*," Hamlet proceeds to seek a rational explanation for the abundance of evil in light of his belief in divine providence. Hamlet's argument, according to Warburton, is: "*But why need we wonder at this abounding of evil? For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, which though a god, yet shedding its heat and influence upon carrion.*" In other words, he explains the existence of evil by saying that "[i]f this . . . be the case, that the effect follows the thing operated upon [*carrion*] and not the thing operating [a *God*;] why need we wonder, that the supreme cause of all things dissusing its blessings on mankind, who is, as it were, a dead carrion, dead in original sin, man, instead of a proper return of duty, should breed only corruption and vices?" By comparing God to the sun god and evil to maggots, Hamlet engages in a theological reflection which Warburton sees as "a very noble one, and to his purpose." This argument, Warburton contends, "is altogether in character, for Hamlet is perpetually moralizing, and his circumstances make this reflexion very natural" (8: 165-66).

While absorbed in deep philosophical thought, Hamlet is nevertheless aware that to achieve his revenge he must leave Polonius with an impression of love-sick incoherence and therefore should not speak "too consequentially." It is for this strategic reason that Hamlet "stops short" in his philosophical train of thought and turns apparently randomly to the subject of Ophelia (8: 165). Capell

writes that "the introduction of the "daughter" into their discourse, the abrupt way it is done in, the wild thought about her, and the wilder order of dressing it, all contribute to fix in Polonius the opinion Hamlet wishes to put in him,—that he is mad, and his daughter the cause of it" (1: 131). This is a good example of how, in the early parts of the play, the editors are able to find method in Hamlet's madness by voicing this understanding of Hamlet's underlying nature: Hamlet as a moral, noble, philosophically-minded strategist who tries to convince the corrupt people surrounding him that he is mad so that he can avenge his father's death.

As the play progresses, however, and Hamlet's revenge is delayed, the editors find it increasingly difficult to identify an underlying principle that would explain Hamlet's behaviour. In many instances, his actions seem chaotic, arbitrary, and consisting of elements that would illuminate his character in contrasting, morally irreconcilable lights. After witnessing Claudius's reaction to the play, Hamlet is convinced of his uncle's guilt, and has an opportunity to kill him while Polonius is repenting. He decides, however, to delay his revenge so that he can kill Claudius while he is engaged in a sinful activity, thus condemning him to hell: "Then trip him that his heels may kick at heaven,/And that his soul may be as damned and black/As hell, whereto it goes" (3.3.93-95). Johnson says that this speech, in which Hamlet, otherwise "represented as a virtuous character, is not content with taking blood for blood, but contrives damnation for the man that he would punish, is too horrible to be read or to be uttered" (8: 990). For Johnson, the desire to damn a man to hell is inconsistent with being a virtuous

character, and therefore Shakespeare's words can no longer be regarded as worthy of articulation.

As Hamlet's behaviour becomes more difficult to explain with rational, moral principles, the editors also grow increasingly impatient with his lack of action. Johnson criticizes Hamlet for the fact that his strategy does not achieve its stated purpose of avenging his father's death, for "after he has, by the stratagem of the play, convicted the King, he makes no attempt to punish him, and his death is at last affected by an incident which Hamlet has no part in producing." Ultimately, the editors are unable to defend Hamlet's feigned madness as a rational, morally justifiable strategy. When Hamlet asks for Laertes's pardon before the fencing match and uses madness to explain his actions, Johnson responds critically, saying: "I wish Hamlet had made some other defence; it is unsuitable to the character of a good or brave man, to shelter himself in falsehood" (8: 1010-11). Capell similarly criticizes him for "founding his excuse to Laertes upon a circumstance of which he knew the fictitiousness" (1: 148-49).

The editors found Hamlet's feigned madness particularly objectionable when they considered its painful effect on Ophelia. Eighteenth-century critics were profoundly saddened by the mental deterioration of Ophelia, a character whom, unlike Hamlet, they idealized without reservation. Johnson writes that at the end of *Hamlet*, "the gratification which would arise from the destruction of an usurper and a murderer, is abated by the untimely death of Ophelia, the young, the beautiful, the harmless, and the pious" (1011). Unlike Hamlet's feigned madness, Ophelia's all-too-real madness could be coherently explained, the editors felt, as

the tragic consequence of Hamlet's mistreatment of her, which for Steevens "cannot fail to disgust every modern reader" (10: 296), as well as the consequence of his killing of her father.

Laertes calls Ophelia a "document in madness" (4.5.179). This expression resonated powerfully with the editors because it catered perfectly to their Newtonian view of Shakespeare's characters as instruments for teaching the varied phenomena of human nature. Hardin Aasand shows how the eighteenth-century editorial tradition involved an attempt to make madness "lucid and rational" by explaining its operations in coherent terms. The editors, he demonstrates, aimed to provide "a dramatic anatomy of Ophelia's condition" through "a rational, logical clarification of the text's intended meaning" (227-28, 236-38).

The editors' analysis of Ophelia's madness focuses on the symbolism implied in the flowers that she distributes before her death. This scene, Capell writes, is "pregnant with that kind of sense" that is "so strong" that it brings coherence to apparently incoherent behaviour (1: 144). Johnson writes that "there is probably some mythology" in Ophelia's choice of flowers, but he could not explain it (8: 998). While other editors attempted to describe the significance of the various flowers, the complete explanation came, not surprisingly, from the meticulous Malone. Malone quotes a poem from a collection printed in 1584 to show that the violet was a symbol of faithfulness during Shakespeare's time:

Violet is for faithfulnesse,

Which in me shall abide;

> Hoping likewise that from your heart
>
> You will not let it slide

Malone also quotes the commentator Henley to show that the daisy was associated with a warning to "light-of-love wenches not to trust every faire promise that such amorous bachelors make them" (9: 371).

The editors were especially intrigued with Ophelia's use of the rue. They believed that the grieving Ophelia addressed Gertrude when she said: "There's rue for you; and here's some for me. We may call it herb grace o' Sundays. O, you must wear your rue with a difference" (4.5.181-4). Malone explains these words by recalling that rue, also called herb of grace, was traditionally associated with sorrow. He contends that Ophelia "means . . . that the queen may with peculiar propriety on *Sundays*, when she solicits pardon for that crime which she has so much occasion to *rue* and repent of, call her rue, *herb of grace*." Malone bolsters this interpretation with a passage from *King Richard II*:

> Here did she fall a tear; here in this place
>
> I'll set a bank of rue, sour herb of grace.
>
> Rue, even for ruth, here shortly shall be seen,
>
> In the remembrance of a weeping queen. (3.4.104-7)

In this way Ophelia invokes the rue to remind the queen of the sadness that she must feel at her shameful marriage and "tells her, she may wear it with a *difference*, to distinguish it from that worn by Ophelia herself; because her tears flowed from the loss of a father, those of the queen ought to flow for her guilt" (9: 371). Ophelia's madness is thus fundamentally different from Hamlet's across a

dimension that mattered a great deal to the editors: it fulfils a moral purpose.

Unlike Hamlet who deteriorates morally during the course of his feigned

madness, Ophelia's function as a moral agent culminates with her mental

deterioration.

Joshua Reynolds, whom Malone quotes in his edition, writes that "a great

sensibility, or none at all, seems to produce the same effect. In the latter the

audience supply what she wants, and with the former they sympathize" (9: 358).

Ophelia is liked by the audience because they pity her for her lack of sensibility.

Hamlet, on the other hand, fails to generate a coherent reaction from the audience

and readers because (with the exception of the early scenes in which he appears as

a rational philosopher) he does not have full sensibility, but at the same time he

never completely loses his sensibility so as to evoke the kind of sympathy that

Ophelia does.

Steevens, the loudest critic of Hamlet's flaws, concludes the discussion of

the play by providing a summary of the hero's disappointing and contradictory

behaviour:

> Hamlet, at the command of his father's ghost, undertakes with seeming
>
> alacrity to revenge the murder; and declares he will banish all other
>
> thoughts from his mind. He makes, however, but one effort to keep his
>
> word, and that is, when he mistakes Polonius for the king . . . . Though he
>
> assassinated Polonius by accident, yet he deliberately procures the
>
> execution of his school-fellows, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who
>
> appear to have been unacquainted with the treacherous purposes of the

mandate which they were employed to carry. Their death (as he declares

in a subsequent conversation with Horatio) gives him no concern, for they

obtruded themselves into the service, and he thought he had a right to

destroy them. He is not less accountable for the distraction and death of

Ophelia . . . . He comes to insult the brother of the dead, and to boast an

affection for his sister, which, before, he had denied to her face; and yet at

this very time must be considered as desirous of supporting the character

of a madman, so that the openness of his confession is not to be imputed to

him as a virtue. He apologizes to Horatio afterwards for the absurdity of

this behaviour, to which, he says, he was provoked by that nobleness of

fraternal grief, which, indeed, he ought rather to have applauded than

condemned. Dr. Johnson has observed, that to bring about a reconciliation

with Laertes, he has availed himself of a dishonest fallacy; and to

conclude, it is obvious to the most careless spectator or reader, that he kills

the king at last to revenge himself, and not his father.

These details amount to what for Steevens is an inevitable conclusion: Hamlet is a

character with an "immoral tendency" (10: 411-12).

Tendency, however, is not the same as a simple, coherent underlying

principle that would unify and explain the character's behaviour. Such an

underlying principle was precisely what the editors were in search of, and it was

that which they could not find. Brian Vickers describes a critical inclination in

the eighteenth century to argue that Hamlet does not really mean what he says and

does, and that there must be a hidden explanation for his behaviour ("Emergence

of Character Criticism" 15). As to what that hidden unifying "law" was, however, the editors were at a loss. Ultimately, Johnson has no choice but to conclude that Hamlet is more of "an instrument" of the plot than "an agent" because his actions cannot be explained consistently. This is a disappointing conclusion indeed for an editor who founded his editing of Shakespeare on the idea that his characters embodied the universal principles of human nature.

A different Underlying Principle: Hamlet as Shakespeare?

As far as character criticism went, the attempt to find coherence in Hamlet failed. However, the increasingly historical orientation of editing in the second half of the eighteenth century, combined with the growing editorial attention to Shakespeare as a man, opened another way to understand the character of Hamlet. This was the idea that Hamlet was, in fact, the voice of Shakespeare. Hamlet, the argument goes, is incoherent and confusing because he is just like Shakespeare himself: a person of superior understanding but also of erratic and often morally questionable practices, and with a tendency towards nonsense and verbosity.

The meta-theatrical parts of *Hamlet* are important for the editors' association of Shakespeare with the play's lead character. Warburton explicitly identifies Hamlet with Shakespeare when he comments on the prince's reaction to the player's speech about Hecuba. "[I]f any one will . . . say," Warburton contends, "that *Shakespear* intended to represent a player unnaturally and fantastically affected, we must appeal to *Hamlet*, that is, to *Shakespear* himself, in this matter." After equating Hamlet with Shakespeare, Warburton proceeds to analyze Hamlet's famous "what's Hecuba to him" soliloquy as a demonstration of

Hamlet's appreciation of the power of acting, all the while implying that Hamlet

is, in fact, Shakespeare's voice (8: 270).

Malone, in particular, devotes considerable attention to the theatrical parts

of *Hamlet*. Drawing on the knowledge of Elizabethan theatre which he gained

during the course of his research, Malone demonstrates that these parts often

reflect Shakespeare's own professional experience and environment. For

example, Malone annotates Polonius's discussion of acting Julius Caesar with

descriptions of actual productions involving Caesar in British universities during

Shakespeare's time (9: 305). With reference to Hamlet's suggestion that he might

join the theatre as an actor, possibly with a "whole share," Malone provides the

following annotation: "The actors in our author's time had not annual salaries as

at present. The whole receipts of each theatre were divided into shares, of which

the proprietors of the theatre, or house-keepers, as they were called, had some;

and each actor had one or more shares, or part of a share, according to his merit.

See The Account of the Ancient Theatres, Vol. I, Part II" (9: 316).

Hamlet's praise for the actor, as well as his desire to join the troupe,

suggest a positive attitude towards the theatre as a mirror of reality and a place

congenial for the pursuit of truth. It is a place where Hamlet, so alienated at the

Danish court, seems to feel at home, just as Shakespeare felt at home in the

theatre. At the same time, the editors also suggest that Shakespeare used the

meta-theatrical scenes in *Hamlet* to criticize the theatrical environment of his age

and to express a sense of frustration and alienation from it.

For instance, commenting on Polonius's reaction to the player's speech in Act Two, Scene Two, Warburton writes that Shakespeare intended that response to represent the "false taste" of the audience during his time. "When the actor comes to the finest and most pathetic part of the speech," Warburton says, Polonius "cries out, *this is too long*; on which *Hamlet*, in contempt of his ill judgment, replies, *It shall to the barber's with thy beard*." Polonius, Warburton says, has a "wrong, unnatural taste," and Hamlet's attack on it mirrors Shakespeare's bitterness at having to cater to such an audience (8: 270-71). Just as Hamlet feels trapped and isolated in the Danish court in which he has to interact with morally and intellectually inferior characters such as Polonius, so does Shakespeare, the universal genius, feels constrained by the conditions of the crude Elizabethan theatre. By invoking the underlying principle that Hamlet is Shakespeare, the editors solicit powerful, "authorial" support for their criticism of the Elizabethan theatre, and hence for their alteration of Shakespeare's plays.

In addition to the theatre, another source of materials that contributed to the identification of Shakespeare with Hamlet was the sonnets. Malone was the first editor to annotate the sonnets, which he repeatedly linked to Shakespeare's experiences as a private man. In Malone's view, previous editors' exclusion of the sonnets led to a failure to fully appreciate the Shakespearean canon. He draws several parallels between *Hamlet* and the sonnets. For example, Malone relates Hamlet's comment that he saw his father in his "mind's eye" (1.2.185) to the use of that expression in Sonnet 113 (9: 207). He also relates Hamlet's use of the expression "this majestical roof fretted with golden fire" (2.2.298-99) to describe

his melancholia to Sonnet 21 (9: 262). In light of the personal nature of the sonnets, these annotations encouraged the idea that Shakespeare's creation of the character of Hamlet may have been inspired by his own personal experiences and inner emotions rather than by his observation of other people.

The increasingly historical and comparative approach to Shakespeare editing during the last decades of the eighteenth century also resulted in attention being paid to the source of Hamlet, Saxo Grammaticus's *Amleth*. While today comparisons of Shakespeare's plays to their sources are standard practice among editors, the first editor to mention the source of *Hamlet* was Steevens, and Malone was the first to examine it closely. What emerges from Malone's comparative study of *Hamlet* in relation to its source is the acknowledgment that ambiguity is a major principle of Shakespeare's play, a principle introduced deliberately by Shakespeare. For example, speaking about Hamlet's feelings for his mother and about the question of Gertrude's knowledge of her husband's murder, Warburton said: "the truth is, that Shakespeare himself meant to leave the matter in doubt" (9: 331).

Today, the association of *Hamlet* with ambiguity may seem like a commonplace. However, within the editorial culture in which Malone operated it was, in many ways, a revolutionary idea. After all, the editors spent almost a century trying to identify a coherent, rational principle that would explain Hamlet's behaviour. While the tremendous energy that they brought into the search for the underlying "law" of Hamlet was Newtonian in nature, their detailed engagement with that character ultimately led them to the awareness that the

Newtonian search for underlying laws cannot be applied to every Shakespearean character. Johnson wrote that "we must allow to the tragedy of Hamlet the praise of variety" (8: 427). Unlike the variety of the Newtonian universe, however, the variety of *Hamlet* does not always contain order. Aaron Hill wrote in *The Prompter* for 24 October 1735 that "the Poet had adorn'd [Hamlet] with a succession of the most opposite Beauties, which are *varied*, like *Colours* on the Cameleon, according to the *different Lights* in which we behold him" (Vickers *Critical Heritage* 3: 35).

When applied to the character of Hamlet, then, the Newtonian search for underlying principles produces the ironic effect of highlighting the limitations of the scientific worldview in relation to literary character. As an entity rich in ambiguity and relying upon the operations of language, a character such as Hamlet differs significantly from physical objects as a subject of study and does not easily lend itself to scientific investigation. At the same time, the editors' insatiable desire to discover Hamlet's underlying principle demonstrates the persistent influence of Newtonian ways of thinking on their mentality, an influence which indeed persisted beyond the eighteenth century as readers continued to ponder Hamlet's essence.

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[1] All subsequent citations from Johnson in this chapter are from *Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. Arthur Sherbo. *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*. Vol. 8. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968.

[2] Eighteenth-century editions do not include line numbers. Therefore, line numbers in this chapter refer to G.R. Hibbard's edition of *Hamlet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[3] All references to Capell in this chapter are to his *Notes and Various Readings to Shakespeare*.

Conclusion

The Persistence of the Newtonian Shakespeare

The realization that Shakespeare's editors were invested in the truth-seeking project of their age brings much-needed coherence to our understanding of their views and practices. The Shakespearean eighteenth-century editorial project is better understood when it is seen within the aspiration of the Enlightenment towards useful knowledge of human nature. As one comes to understand the editors' sense of purpose and their involvement in the scientific ferment of their period, the central features of their language and practice that previously seemed fuzzy, misguided, or even nonsensical are thrown into relief. In particular, it becomes possible to explain more historically and more fully their focus on character, as well as their emphasis on method and on truth in their discussions of their own work.

This is the legacy of the eighteenth-century editorial tradition when viewed in light of the search for knowledge: Shakespeare is a natural genius who discovered universally valuable truths, but neither developed nor expressed them in a systematic way. He therefore requires the collaboration of another "scientist," less brilliant than him, but more skilled in method: the editor. Together with Shakespeare, the editors figure themselves as participants in the truth-seeking project of the Enlightenment.

Eighteenth-century Shakespeare editing, when viewed through the Newtonian lens, comes into clearer focus as a set of practices that developed in response to the culture's admiration for method and its belief in the possibility of finding general truths about human nature. Science, certainly, was not the only or the paramount shaper of editorial attitudes. The motivations for the editorial project are multi-faceted and inter-related. Nationalism and commercial publishing were certainly among the factors that operated together with science to inform editorial attitudes to Shakespeare. Nevertheless, the calling of the editorial project was not simply a material one. Ego, ideology and money played a part, but fundamentally what drove the editors in their work was a search for knowledge and truth. The editors, no doubt, were often misguided in their practices. There are considerable gaps between their self-descriptions and their practices, as well as significant individual differences between their respective practices. Nevertheless, the Newtonian spirit gave the editorial project unity and coherence through the persistent emphasis on knowledge and on truth-seeking.

As the century progressed and British nation-building gained momentum, the relative disregard for his language and for his cultural and historical background gave way to a growing editorial preoccupation with the minute details of Shakespeare's language and historical situation. This was a significant shift indeed away from the relatively trans-historical tendencies of the earlier decades. The reasons for this shift, however, demonstrate the persistence of the emphasis on knowledge and truth-seeking in the editing of Shakespeare. The desire to study Shakespeare in close linguistic and historical detail derived from the idea

that his writings were a reservoir of useful knowledge about humanity. The argument that Shakespeare, the leading British author, speaks for all of humanity is not simply a feature of British empire-building. It is to be understood in light of the scientific search for general knowledge through the recording and study of local particulars.

My two-pronged argument throughout this dissertation is that science helped to shape not only the editors' conception of their profession as a truth-seeking enterprise, but also their view of Shakespeare as a Newton-like genius who discovered the universal principles of human nature. The editors up to and including Johnson advanced an abstract image of Shakespeare as an investigator who discovered the principles of human nature, while at the same time being, metaphorically speaking, nature itself—an entity of endless diversity that nevertheless contains underlying order. These editors, with the exception of Theobald, had relatively little interest in Shakespeare as an actual historical man, viewing him instead as a transcendental genius. The period in which Shakespeare lived, which they regarded as barbaric in relation to the Enlightenment, was a source of embarrassment to these editors, an unfortunate circumstance from which the essence of Shakespeare's genius needed to be rescued. Shakespeare's achievement for them lay precisely in his ability to transcend the circumstances of his life and the corrupt theatrical environment in which he worked and discover truths of universal validity that remained embodied in his canon. By the end of the century, however, Shakespeare was viewed as a man deeply embedded in the cultural and theatrical context of his time, a man motivated to write by personal

experience and emotion, not simply by a desire to discover universal truths about humanity.

Ironically, while Malone was the most Newton-like of Shakespeare's editors in terms of the seriousness with which he approached the search for Shakespearean truth, the view of Shakespeare that emerged from his findings is less Newton-like than that of the less systematic editors. Ironically, as editorial methods were applied with increasing vigour to Shakespeare's writings throughout the course of the eighteenth century, the findings that emerged made the Newton-like image of him as a disinterested investigator, and the view of his writings as a reservoir of general truths about humanity, harder to sustain.

Nevertheless, even as the editorial image of Shakespeare and the set of editorial practices evolved gradually away from the Newtonian ideal towards an image and a set of practices more similar to those accepted today, the underlying scientifically inspired principles of the Shakespearean editorial project maintained a tenacious hold on the imaginations of the editors and of their readers throughout the eighteenth century. The story of eighteenth-century Shakespeare editing is ultimately the story of the persistence of two key ideas: Shakespeare as a reservoir of useful, universally and nationally significant, knowledge, and editing as a truth-seeking enterprise. It is the story of a mentality that, even while it might seem strange, still affects our view of Shakespeare to this day.

Today, even though Shakespeare's editors acknowledge that their work must often rely on guesswork and speculation, their methods rest on the ideals established by their scientifically minded eighteenth-century predecessors. We

might think about the eighteenth-century editors' search for truth in the same way that Francis Bacon thought about alchemy when he compared it in the *Advancement of Learning* "to the husbandman whereof Aesop makes the fable that when he died told his sons that he had left unto them gold buried under ground in his vineyard; and they digged over all the ground, and gold they found none, but by reason of their stirring and digging the mould about the roots of their vines, they had a great vintage the year following" (143).[1] The editors believed that there was gold buried in the Shakespearean corpus, and they toiled to find it. Regardless of whether or not we agree that there are great universal truths about human nature buried in the Shakespearean vineyard, and of what we think about eighteenth-century editorial methods, the Shakespeare that we read today is partly the "great vintage" of these "Newtonian" editors.

[1] I gleaned this analogy between Bacon's view of alchemy and editorial method from A.E. Housman, *The Confines of Criticism. The Cambridge Inaugural 1911. The Complete Text with Notes by John Carter* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1969), 19-20.

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