

SHAKESPEARE LECTURE

EDWARD CAPELL AND HIS EDITION OF
SHAKESPEARE

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THE honour of the invitation to give this lecture prompts me to pay tribute to a neglected Shakespearian. Edward Capell was a contemporary of Johnson, whose *Shakespeare* was going through the press at the same time as his own, but whereas Johnson's edition was the last of the old school of editing Capell's was the first of the new, for it was based on a thorough examination of variant readings in early texts and on reasoned deductions about their transmission. Earlier editors had made so little use of this kind of evidence that Capell's project was ridiculed. Warburton thought it 'fantastical' that he should vie with Johnson and begged Garrick to get him to stand down and leave Johnson a clear field.¹ When Capell's edition appeared (in 1768), his contemporaries thought poorly of it, since it had no explanatory notes, and when his *Notes* were published they professed not to understand them. All the same, later editors took to heart his strictures on earlier methods; they often appropriated his ideas without acknowledgement; and what he urged as the most profitable course for further inquiry provided the programme for Malone. The most impudent of these purloiners was George Steevens, responsible for the revised editions of Johnson's *Shakespeare* which came out in and after the 1770's. This did not pass without notice at the time, though it was not until the *Cambridge Shakespeare* that Capell received his due. What we owe to him in the way of emendation is therefore well known. What is not generally realized is how methodically he cleared the text of an accretion of errors and conjectural emendations and how often his conclusions about its transmission anticipated present opinion.

It is therefore not surprising that no critical examination has ever been made of the unpublished works which he gave to Trinity College, Cambridge. These included an edition of *Paradise Lost* and a treatise on phonetics. Nor has much effort been

¹ Writing to Garrick, 19 December 1756. All references to Garrick's correspondence are to Boaden's (1831) edition.

made to supplement Bullen's notice in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.¹ This is not my main concern here, though a brief account of him is pertinent to his role as the first systematic editor of Shakespeare.

He was the eldest son of the Rev. Gamaliel Capell and was born on 11 June 1713 at Troston Hall, his mother's home, near Bury St. Edmunds. In 1720 his father inherited the nearby manor of Stanton with the living of Stanton All Saints and, after attending Bury Grammar School, he was admitted in May 1730 to St. Catharine's Hall, Cambridge, and the Middle Temple. The next known landmark was his appointment as Deputy Inspector of Plays in 1737. He owed this office and his further appointment in 1745 as a Groom of the Privy Chamber to the second Duke of Grafton, the Lord Chamberlain and a friend of his grandfather's. The two posts provided an income of close on £300 a year,² and he later inherited the manors of Troston and Stanton. He had thus the means to follow the career of his choice. This was 'to do Service to good Letters by setting an Example of Care and Fidelity to Persons who take upon them the Publication of our best Authors',³ and his maximum wish was to be known as 'the Restorer of Shakespeare'.⁴ He lived in London in the Temple (where he died on 24 February 1781) and in later life spent his summers at a house which he had built at Hastings—occupied in the main with his *Shakespeare*.

There is an entertaining account of him by a contemporary, Samuel Pegge, the antiquary.⁵ It was written in 1790 and was prompted by the slighting notice of him (probably by Steevens) in the 1782 *Biographica Dramatica*. Pegge allowed him many virtues (honour, liberality, industry, and prudence) and that he had 'the carriage, manners, and sentiments of a gentleman', but he had no patience with the exclusiveness of Capell's interests and his unsociable ways:

During the time that he was so immersed in Shakespeare, he secluded himself in great measure from the world, admitting very few people to an audience, and these were such as could talk about Shakespeare themselves, or had patience to hear him on the subject:—but he that strenuously opposed his opinions was forbid the court. If you had suffi-

¹ Apart from a brief article ('Edward Capell at Hastings') by Mrs. Ethel Lofft Wade in *The Sussex County Magazine*, January 1930.

² The estimate is Pegge's; see note 5.

³ Dedication to his *Prolusions*.

⁴ Reported by Pegge; see note 5.

⁵ First published in John Nichols's *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century*, vol. i (1817), pp. 465–76.

cient address to hear him prose about various readings, transpositions of passages, &c. you might preserve yourself tolerably well in his graces:—but it was labour and sorrow, for he was *all over Shakespeare*. He used to frequent the evening *conversazione* at the Bishop of Lincoln's (Green)—and afterwards at Dr. Heberden's; but it is said that the share he took in them was not the most agreeable, from his being too *opiniatre* and dictatorial. When he left off attending these Attic evenings, he became almost an anchorite.

He describes with the same annoyance Capell's seclusion at Hastings:

This house was placed in a situation of all others the most uninteresting to a man of taste, who looks for diversity of prospect, lawns, groves, rivulets, &c.; for it was close to the sea, at the dirty port of Hastings. . . . Here for the last twenty years of his life, he passed his hours from May till October, equally unknowing and unknown, for he was of too haughty a spirit to associate with the inhabitants, and too much an humourist to be sought for by the neighbouring gentry. At first indeed he used to make morning visits to the Earl of Ashburnham and the Bishop of Chichester (Sir William Ashburnham, who had a patrimonial seat in the neighbourhood); but even these wore away, and he became at last as much a Hermit at Hastings as in his Chambers in the Temple.

As further evidence of his singularity, Pegge tells the story of a friend of Capell's who was asked 'to leave his cane in the vestibule, lest he either should dirt the floors with it, or soil the carpet', adding as the last straw in his indictment that

No one but himself was permitted to stir his fire, or snuff his candles; and to remove and misplace the most trifling thing in his room was a heinous offence.

Pegge meant to do well by Capell, but would clearly have been more at home with a robust subject like Johnson, who tilted his candle over Mrs. Boswell's carpet to make it burn more brightly, dusted his books by buffeting them in hedging gloves, and wrote of Garrick's fastidiousness about floors and carpets (*Rambler*, 200) with the same impatience as Pegge wrote of Capell's.

Capell's friendship with Garrick may therefore have rested on more than a common interest in the theatre, Shakespeare, and their libraries. Pegge mentions that there was sometimes a coolness between them (for both were so vain, he explained, that 'the least slight on either side put things out of tune'), but from two letters of Capell's to Garrick in 1777 and 1778 it would seem that the *Notes* to his *Shakespeare* would not have been published without

Garrick's persuasion. 'An odd devil' was Garrick's endorsement on the earlier of these letters, but he seems to have given the devil his due and to have acted as a buffer state between Capell and a hostile world. 'I would not have plagued you on the score of Capell, but that I believed you to be the only person who was at peace with him', Steevens wrote in June 1775. The letter is one of several designed to slight Capell, who was, in fact, one of the few editors of Shakespeare to keep aloof from undignified bickering.

The 'spirit of nicety and refinement' that Pegge found so uncongenial was expressed in the calligraphic hand of Capell's prime and in the typographical elegance of his acting version of *Antony and Cleopatra* (prepared for Garrick), his *Prolusions*, and his *Shakespeare*. All three were printed by Dryden Leach, who had some interest in fine printing, but years of planning on Capell's part was the secret of their typographical distinction. I shall have more to say later about the devices he employed for reducing to a minimum extraneous matter displeasing to the eye and distracting to the mind—an aesthetic problem for every editor whose text needs explication. What forethought was given to the appearance of his works is evident from the Trinity manuscript of his text of *Measure for Measure*. This was transcribed early in 1750 (eighteen years before his *Shakespeare* was published and ten years before printing began with this play¹) and it is set out as Capell intended it to be printed, even in respect of white space and rules. The elegance of Leach's printing of Capell's works has, in short, a calligraphic basis in which nothing was left to chance or the whims of the printer.

His *Shakespeare*, which included the thirty-six plays of the First Folio, was published in ten small octavo volumes in 1768. Printing had started in September 1760 with the second volume and eight were in print by August 1765. He mentions these facts in his Introduction (p. 18, note), written in 1766, to explain why he had not made use of Johnson's edition, which had appeared in 1765. He had, he said, looked it 'but slightly over' and knew only that 'the text it follows is that of it's nearest predecessor, and from that copy it was printed'. He had thus behind him the work of what he called the 'five moderns' (Rowe, Pope, Theobald, Hanmer, and Warburton), and it was to this editorial tradition that Johnson's *Shakespeare* belonged.

Johnson had, indeed, made no pretence of having taken much

¹ *Measure for Measure* was the first play of vol. ii. Printing began with this volume in September 1760; see the Introduction to his *Shakespeare*, p. 18, note.

trouble over his text and his title-page claimed to provide no more than the plays with the corrections and illustrations of various commentators, which he had supplemented with notes of his own. His notes are the most valuable feature of his edition, since he did little to implement the strenuous programme of his 1756 *Proposals* for the kind of collation which Capell was already carrying out. What prompted Capell's *Shakespeare* was, he tells us, the licentiousness of Hanmer's (1744), which claimed to have established 'a true and correct Edition of Shakespeare's works cleared from the corruptions with which they have abounded' simply by looking them over (in Pope's text) with a careful eye for obscurities and absurdities. This kind of amateurishness was encouraged, as Capell saw, by the bad practice of building on the wrong foundations. Rowe's edition was based on the Fourth Folio, Pope's on Rowe's, and later editors had similarly corrected a predecessor's work either conjecturally or (sporadically) in the light of any quarto they chanced to possess, so that they were at best patching a fabric that should have been razed to the ground:

the superstructure cannot be a sound one, which is built upon so bad a foundation as that work of Mr. Rowe's; which all of them, as we see, in succession, have yet made their corner-stone: The truth is, it was impossible that such a beginning should end better than it has done: the fault was in the setting-out; and all the diligence that could be us'd, join'd to the discernment of a Pearce, or a Bentley, could never purge their Author of all his defects by their method of proceeding. (Introduction, p. 19.)

Capell saw that the first need was to collate all the relevant material—a duty which others had slacked, partly from lack of quartos. Possessed of more quartos than any previous editor, as well as vastly more patience, Capell began to collate, and then, he tells us, 'a ray of light broke forth upon him', for

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 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—they may be quitted; nor yet in those, without notice. (Introduction, p. 20.)

He decided that, in general, the 'best' edition was the most ancient and in the Table of quarto editions appended to his Introduction he indicated by the word 'best' the edition which he

had made the basis of his own, giving priority to the earliest good quarto known to him of the eight plays of which the Folio text was substantially a reprint (*Much Ado*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Richard II*, *1 Henry IV*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Romeo and Juliet*); and whether by good luck or good judgement he decided that the genuine 1600 quartos of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Merchant of Venice* were the 'best'. He also concluded that the quarto texts of *Troilus and Cressida*, *Hamlet*, and *King Lear* were superior to the Folio's, but thought the Folio the 'best' for *2 Henry IV*, *Richard III*, and *Othello*. Some of these last half-dozen problems are still with us and few are likely to agree with all his conclusions about them. What is important is that he revolutionized textual theory by laying down the principle that the 'best' text (i.e. the one closest to manuscript or to the best manuscript) should be made the basis of an edition, thus breaking with the traditional method of patching up the Folio text with only a selection of quarto readings. The result of this return to the substantive editions was the restoration of hundreds of authoritative readings. On this account we may allow him the title of 'the Restorer of Shakespeare'.

His vindication of the quartos was carried further in his reasoned challenge to Pope's inference that the manuscripts from which the plays were printed were either prompt-copies, corrupted by playhouse interpolations, or assembled texts, made up from actors' parts. Here Capell also anticipated modern opinion in arguing that the quartos were, for the most part, 'the Poet's own copies [i.e. manuscripts], however they were come by' [i.e. whether they were surreptitiously obtained or not]. As evidence he cited what he believed to be Shakespeare's first and second thoughts, actors' names, and ghost characters. Innogen, he argued in his later *Notes*, could only have got into *Much Ado* because of Shakespeare's having dropped his first intention to make use of her. The plays first printed in the Folio similarly rested, he thought, on more authoritative manuscripts than Pope and later editors had allowed.

What this so far amounts to is that Capell's textual theory broke, with good reason, from his predecessors' and that his reasoning about the transmission of the plays was broadly much like that of today. Furthermore, he set an example, which has not been followed as often as it should have been, by having his text set up from his own transcripts so as to avoid the pitfalls of using printed copy. Tradition has it that he transcribed the

plays ten times. I have already referred to the one transcript that survives, the one he gave to Trinity College, Cambridge. Though the plays are bound in Folio order, the transcript of each is dated, the dates running from 25 November 1749 to 1 August 1766.¹ The last play to be transcribed was *The Taming of the Shrew*, probably because he hoped till the last to find a copy of *A Shrew*, which only Pope among his predecessors had seen. What Pope knew was the 1607 quarto, but it was not until 1779 that Capell had the chance of seeing even this quarto (the third). It then turned up in a sale room, but, to his great disappointment, the prize was secured by Malone at what was then 'the exorbitant price of two guineas'. Capell 'was so miserable about it, that he wrote three letters to the bookseller that sold it, requesting to let him have a sight of it'. This increased its interest for Malone and when Capell offered him a choice of 'two or even three' of his duplicate Shakespeare quartos 'of elder date than his *Shrew*' in exchange for it, he refused the offer, though he was willing to lend Capell his *Shrew* in return for the loan of Brooke's *Romeus and Juliet*.

Greg drew attention to the exchange of letters which preceded the loan in the *Review of English Studies*, 1926, and I mention it because Capell's difficulty in obtaining *A Shrew* is a reminder that, in considering the use which eighteenth-century editors made of their material, its limitations must be borne in mind. Pope, but not Theobald, for instance, had the first quarto (1598) of *Love's Labour's Lost*; Theobald, but not Pope, had the quarto of *Much Ado* (1600), and the first quarto (the Fisher quarto, 1600) of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Capell had all three and a number of others which no earlier editor had seen. On the other hand, he did not possess the first good quarto of *Romeo and Juliet* (1599), which Pope and Theobald had had. He was therefore compelled to take the third quarto (1609) as the 'best' text. Further, none of these editors had early editions of some bad quartos and no one had seen the bad quarto (1603) of *Hamlet*—except perhaps Hanmer, since one of the two surviving copies turned up, long after his death, in his library. Among good quartos, no editor had anything earlier than the third (1611) of *Titus Andronicus*. Unless such facts are borne in mind, the use made of the quartos by eighteenth-century editors will seem much more erratic and unprincipled than it was.

Further, some editors (Hanmer, for instance) seem not to have

¹ The dates are given in C. H. Hartshorne's *The Book Rarities in the University of Cambridge*, 1829, pp. 317-18.

taken stock of what they had, or in other ways failed to make use of their opportunities. Drummond's copy of the second quarto of *Titus Andronicus*, presented to Edinburgh University Library in 1627, lay unnoticed until the nineteenth century though Johnson visited the library in August 1773 on his tour to the Hebrides. One cannot help wondering whether Malone, to whom Boswell dedicated the *Tour*, would not have been better pleased if Boswell had been all eyes for the books instead of all ears for Johnson's conversation with the librarian. They 'talked of Kennicott's edition of the Hebrew Bible, and hoped it would be quite faithful'. To a collector like Capell, who not only tried to trace lost quartos like *A Shrew* but also gave them an interest and value which increased their chances of survival, we owe a great debt, and our debt to him is the greater because on his sixty-sixth birthday he prevented the dispersal of the most valuable part of his library by giving it to Trinity College, Cambridge, with the firm injunction¹

that the whole Collection . . . be kept together in the same Class; and that no Manuscript or Book belonging to it be taken out of the Library on any Pretence whatever.

Without the Capell collection there would have been no *Cambridge Shakespeare*.

I have already cited his resolution to stick to the best of the old editions, but the amount of collating he had done left no doubt in his mind that a very generous allowance had to be made for errors of the press (and in this he took a more realistic view of the evidence than Malone). He recognized that, as a rule, each quarto was printed from its immediate predecessor and that 'generally speaking, the more distant they are from the original, the more they abound in faults' (Introduction, p. 13). He saw that this was also true of the Folios and, further, that the inaccuracy of First Folio reprints from quartos gave 'but faint hopes of meeting with greater accuracy in the plays which they first publish'd' (Introduction, p. 6)—a point missed by Malone, who showed how inaccurate these reprints were but failed to take warning from them. Capell was not, therefore, a conservative editor and when he saw reason to believe that a common type of error (such as the omission or interpolation of a word) had occurred, he emended. Opinion is now coming round to his point of view and the more so since it is now known how little

¹ See W. W. Greg, *Catalogue of the Books presented by Edward Capell to the Library of Trinity College in Cambridge* (1903), p. 163.

proof-reading these texts received. His observations ought not, of course, to have been neglected, and one of the greatest blunders of our time has been the supposition that because many Shakespearian texts were set up from autograph, or manuscripts close to autograph, they must be trusted. Capell did not fall into the trap of allowing prints the authority of originals.

He was therefore an eclectic editor and, in a paragraph of his Introduction (pp. 21–22) which has led to some misunderstanding of his methods, he explains his eclectic principles as follows:

Had the editions thus follow'd [i.e. the 'best' texts] been printed with carefulness, from correct copies [i.e. manuscripts], and copies not added to or otherwise alter'd after those impressions, there had been no occasion for going any further: but this was not at all the case, even in the best of them; and it therefore became proper and necessary to look into the other old editions, and to select from thence whatever improves the Author, or contributes to his advancement in perfectness, the point in view throughout all this performance: that they do improve him, was with the editor an argument in their favour; and a presumption of genuineness for what is thus selected, whether additions, or differences of any other nature; and the causes of their appearing in some copies, and being wanting in others, cannot now be discover'd, by reason of the time's distance, and defect of fit materials for making the discovery. Did the limits of his Introduction allow of it, the editor would gladly have dilated and treated more at large this article of his plan; as that which is of greatest importancé, and most likely to be contested of any thing in it.

What Capell here claims is that, owing to the negligence of printers and the fact that the best texts were not printed from definitive fair copy, eclectic editing is unavoidable. What he did not mean is that he proposed to construct his text simply by selecting from the old editions any improvement they offered, for this was not his practice. In *The Merchant of Venice* (iv. i. 99–100), for instance, Q₁ runs

The pound of flesh which I demand of him
is deerly bought, as mine and I will haue it:

Q₂'s reading 'tis mine' improved the sense, but he legitimately dismissed it as a compositor's bodge and emended (on his own account) to 'is mine'. In *Othello* (i. iii. 330), where 'braine' in the Folio (his 'best' text) was plainly an error, he condemned editors who accepted the quarto's 'balance' and justified Theobald's emendation 'beam':

Were 'beam' spelt as of old with an (e) final, it's corruption into the word below [i.e. 'braine', cited in his footnote to the text] is very easy

and natural: consider'd then as a true folio reading, the word *beam* or *beame* merits preference that way; and if consider'd another way, as a word absolutely unequivocal, and us'd often by Shakespeare in the sense that belongs to it, we shall not greatly applaud the gentlemen who discard it for—*balance*.

These are, of course, sound principles of emendation and the more so since he surmised that the 1622 *Othello* quarto was

pyrated from some stage-copy that was abridg'd for convenience: the quarto next in succession, for these abridg'd passages mostly went to the folio, which it sometimes improves; visibly in a term of the song's first line, which will be judg'd a corruption, though moderns are pleas'd to follow it.

He refers to the Willow Song, omitted in Q1 and restored in Q2 from the Folio but with the improved reading 'sighing' ('The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree'). He knew that this was correct, since he had found an independent version of the song, and he therefore rejected the Folio's 'singing', which earlier editors had accepted, though he did not know how Q2, which was mainly a derivative text, had come by its correction.

As these extracts from his *Notes* show, what he was working towards was, in fact, an eclecticism which depended on reasoned conclusions about the interrelationship of editions, and in this respect his methods were new and anticipated the eclecticism of today. They now seem rudimentary but he had the heart of the matter in him even when he sacrificed the truth to contemporary prejudice. On Claudius's interment of Polonius, for instance, he writes as follows:

Though the editor's best judgment suggests no reason to make him think the passage interpolated, but (on the contrary) offers others that favour it's genuineness, yet he could not refuse his assent to the removal which the four latter moderns have made of the low and base compound '*hugger-mugger*;' whose idea we must annex to '*interr*;' for the King does not condemn himself simply for interring Polonius, but interring him in the manner he has done, that is—closely and privately.

That his *Shakespeare* did not receive the attention it merited was due to his refusal to have his pages made unsightly by foot-notes. Until his *Notes* appeared, the only critical apparatus he supplied (apart from his Introduction) was that, in the dialogue of his text, he printed in black letter any word or words that were not in the old editions and that he recorded, at the foot of the page, his copy-text reading if his emendation was taken from the moderns and if it could be accommodated in the one line he

allowed himself for critical matter of this kind. Thus in *Hamlet*, 'bonds' appears in a footnote, since he accepted Theobald's emendation 'bawds', but he did not record Q2's 'friendly' (in the phrase 'like friendly Falconers') which he rejected for the Folio's 'French'. The latter kind of information was reserved for the Various Readings which were to follow with his Notes. There are sixty-five footnotes in his *Hamlet* of the 'bonds' type, all neatly compressed into a single line at the foot of the page, but they give, of course, no inkling either of the number or complexity of the variants or of the difference between his text (based on Q2) and earlier ones (based mainly on the Folio). Readers were thus deprived, until his *Notes* were published, of what was most essential to the appreciation of his methods. His debts to the moderns were acknowledged,¹ but he had yet to show how many authentic readings he had restored from the authoritative texts and on what principles his selection of readings was based.

Even the text was not self-explanatory, since he referred readers (Introduction, p. 28, note) to his earlier *Prolusions* (1760) for the explanation of certain 'new pointings' and 'marks'. The *Prolusions* were editorial experiments 'offer'd to the Publick as Specimens of the Integrity that should be found in the Editions of worthy Authors' and they included 'The Nut-Brown Maid', Sackville's 'Induction', Overbury's 'Wife', *Edward III*, and Sir John Davies's 'Nosce Teipsum'. In his Preface, after describing his general editorial policy, Capell explained the devices he had used to avoid blemishing his text with editorial intrusions.

In the first place, there seem'd to be much want of a particular note of punctuation to distinguish irony; which is often so delicately couch'd as to escape the notice even of the attentive reader, and betray him into error: such a note is therefore introduc'd; being a point ranging with the top of the letter, as the full stop is a point ranging with the bottom. . . . A similar arrangement of the mark, call'd by the printers a dash or a break, affords a new distinction: This in present usage is single, and put always in the middle: in this work it is otherwise; ranging sometimes with the top, and then it serves the purposes to which it has been hitherto assign'd; and sometimes with the bottom, and has a new signification. . . . Wherever it occurs, it denotes constantly a change of the address; if it be at all ambiguous to whom the words are spoken, a name is added; but it is in most cases sufficient to mark where the change begins, and where it ends, if not with the speech; for to persons of the

¹ Though not by name (see his Introduction, p. 23, note), since even initials appeared to him to make the page unsightly.

least intelligence the context will speak the rest. A third mark is, the cross: This, when it has one bar only, is significant of a thing shown or pointed to; when two, of a thing deliver'd: and they are severally plac'd exactly at the very word at which it is proper the pointing be made, or the delivery should take effect. The last, and most extensively useful, of the marks introduc'd is, the double inverted comma; which do constantly and invariably denote in this work that the words they are prefix'd to are spoke apart or aside, and have no other signification whatsoever. It is hop'd, that when these new-invented marks are a little consider'd, they will be found by the candid and discerning to be no improper substitutes to those marginal directions that have hitherto obtain'd; which are both a blemish to the page they stand in, and inadequate to the end propos'd.

In the Introduction to his *Shakespeare* (p. 49), Capell wrote of the Various Readings as 'now finish'd' and promised their publication, with the Notes, 'with all the speed that is convenient'. Part I of these (a quarto ranging with Theobald's *Shakespeare Restored*) appeared in 1774. This included a Glossary and the Notes and Various Readings to the plays in alphabetical order down to 2 *Henry IV*. Its reception was discouraging and Capell withdrew it. A few years later, with Garrick's help, subscriptions were raised towards completing the work in three more substantial volumes and a discouraged Capell (now in ill health) put the work in hand again in the autumn of 1778. He did not live to see its publication, for the third volume was going through the press when he died in February 1781.

The first part of the first volume consisted of the sheets of the 1774 edition with new preliminaries. This volume (except for the preliminaries) was ready in 1779 and the second volume, which completed the Notes and Various Readings, was printed the next year. Appended to the notes to *The Winter's Tale* were 'two little Treatises, that have for subject—the Order and Time of writing the Plays, and the numbers they are writ in' (Vol. I, To the Reader). The third volume, entitled *The School of Shakespeare*, consisted of extracts from printed books which shed light on Shakespeare's sources, allusions, and language. This too had been promised in his 1768 *Shakespeare*, and the Trinity College transcript of this volume occupied him between 3 February 1767 and 16 January 1771.

In each of the four parts of Volumes I and II the matter falls into three sections: first explanatory notes, then errata lists, and then the Various Readings. This makes his matter less useful than it might have been, for, in order to get an integrated

picture, the reader has to go to and fro between the Notes and Various Readings and has to relate both sections to Capell's own text to which reference is by page and line number, though the lines of his text are not numbered. Consulting Capell's commentary is therefore a formidable task requiring great patience.

The Various Readings are no longer of much practical value, but they were the only record of their kind until the *Cambridge Shakespeare* and they marked an enormous advance, both in scope and method, on anything before. Pope, for instance, had made much use of the first good quarto (Q₂) of *Hamlet* but, when he substituted its readings for those of the Folio, he recorded the rejected readings in so haphazard a fashion that no one could tell whence the readings of his text were derived. On his own account, for instance, he substituted 'careless' for 'reckless' (*Hamlet*, I. iii. 49) without notice, and was followed by Theobald and Johnson. Even as late as 1766, after Capell's *Prolusions* had set an example of methodical editing, Steevens's *Twenty of the Plays of Shakespeare* was not, in its apparatus, an advance on Pope's methods, for not only was the collation slapdash but it seems not to have occurred to Steevens that a reader might want to know from which quarto a given variant was derived.

Capell's Notes are today of much more importance than his Various Readings, partly because they elucidate the principles laid down in the Introduction to his *Shakespeare* and partly because their matter has never had the attention it merits. They cover a wide range of topics, though they are mainly textual. For parallel passages, sources, and so on, he expected readers to consult *The School of Shakespeare*. This preoccupation with the text unfortunately ran counter to the current vogue for an anthology of the notes of earlier editors to which the last contributed comments or additions. Capell's stock was therefore low on account of his matter, and it was still lower on account of his informal style, for he was neither of Johnson's circle nor of his school but used the kind of familiar language that he might have exchanged with Garrick:

They who can believe that it was intended by Shakespeare, Demetrius should speak as all copies make him in the entrance of I. 10. in the next page, are in train to swallow any corruption.

What is difficult in his Notes is neither the style, which is attractively free from bookishness, nor the argument, which is rational and often acute, but finding what he is talking about, since he darts from one topic to another, giving only page and

line references to his edition, and the substance often contains nothing that strikes a chord even when the play is a familiar one. It is evident from what follows in the note just cited that in all earlier editions Demetrius exhorted Lysander to 'speak in some bush' and that Capell had punctuated the words correctly; but at other times the reader is entirely at a loss until he has found his place in Capell's text.

The first of the two treatises appended to the Notes followed up a suggestion he had made towards the end of his 1768 Introduction (p. 72): that inquiries about Shakespeare's private life were not likely to be rewarding and that what was known 'had done little more than gratify our curiosity'. He referred to Rowe's *Life*, a regular feature of earlier editions, and recommended that, instead of this kind of inquiry, more knowledge of his public life as a writer

would have consequences more important; a discovery there would throw a new light upon many of his pieces; and, where rashness only is shew'd in the opinions that are now current about them, a judgment might then be form'd, which perhaps would do credit to the giver of it. When he commenc'd a writer for the stage, and in which play; what the order of the rest of them, and (if that be discoverable) what the occasion; and, lastly, for which of the numerous theatres that were then subsisting they were severally written at first,—are the particulars that should chiefly engage the attention of a writer of Shakespeare's *Life*, and be the principal subjects of his enquiry.

Malone acted on this advice and his 'Attempt to Ascertain the Order in which the plays of Shakespeare were written' (first published in 1778) was a more extensive essay than Capell's, though it was much less expert in its conclusions. Where Capell had the advantage was in his more intimate acquaintance with Shakespeare's works, so that he recognized his late style when he saw it. Malone, it will be remembered, originally dated *Henry VIII* 1601, *The Winter's Tale* 1604, and *Cymbeline* 1605. All three were included by Capell in what he judged to be the last four plays—*Cymbeline*, *Henry VIII*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*. Malone's four last plays were *Coriolanus*, *Othello*, *The Tempest*, and *Twelfth Night*.

It has been said that 'scientific criticism of the text begins with Edward Capell'. This was the verdict of Walder, the writer of the chapter on 'The Text of Shakespeare' in the *Cambridge History of English Literature*. Nor was Capell entirely without admirers in his own day. Percy thought highly of his text of 'The Nut-Brown Maid', and Farmer, in *The Learning of Shakespeare*,

spoke of him as 'a very curious [i.e. painstaking] and intelligent gentleman' and 'the most able of all men' to provide information on Shakespeare's sources. A lifetime's work on the methods to be used in editing our best authors had, in fact, qualified Capell to speak with authority on many subjects, and his opinions were neither rashly formed nor lightly held. Nonetheless he has never had the general recognition he merits. It is understandable that contemporaries with less exacting standards should find it easier to scoff at his aims than to emulate them, but it is less understandable that his originality and perception should still receive so little attention. He is not mentioned in the *Oxford Companion to English Literature*, and the *Oxford English Dictionary* overlooks his coinage of the word 'Shakespearian'¹—a title to which no editor has a better claim, both on account of what he did to restore the text and the clarity with which he saw what needed to be done.

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My inquiries about the history of the Capell family (prompted by conflicting statements in biographical notices) have been very materially assisted by the resourcefulness of Miss Dorothy M. White (Chief Librarian of the County Borough of Ipswich Libraries), who has brought to my notice both published and unpublished material of which I hope to make fuller use than the scope of this lecture allows. I am indebted, too, to Mr. A. Halcrow (sub-librarian of Trinity College, Cambridge) and to Mr. M. P. Statham (the Suffolk County Archivist) for photostats, and very especially to the London Library; without its resources (particularly Capell's *Prolusions* and the three volumes of his *Notes*) I could not have proceeded with the subject of my choice.

¹ See his note (p. 23, col. 2) to *All's Well*: "'Stood necessity'd to help," will appear a strange phrase to the meer modern reader, and may startle even the Shakespearian.'