

## Landmarks of Criticism

Edited by Robert F. Willson, Jr., Univ. of Mich.

### ON HAMLET'S 'FAT'

E. Paul Blake, "The Impediment of Adipose," *Popular Science Monthly*, XVII (May 1880)

Medical observers have long recognized that an excessive accumulation of fat, far from adding to a man's strength, is a source of physical sickness, even a sign of incapacity which could lead to a shortened life. But, it was not until the invention of the microscope that the disease known as "fatty degeneration" was truly understood; and its symptoms are now known to include the weakening and impeding of the power of the will. "We know that it disinclines to activity, produces shortness of breath, palpitation of the heart, and comparative weakness in proportion to size, and is often accompanied by anemia."

Shakespeare, a poet who never failed to make physique conform to character, has given us a supreme portrait of the adipose man in Hamlet. "He's fat and scant of breath," Gertrude tells us, yet not one of the numerous writers who have commented on the play, Schlegel and Goethe among them, has chosen to give the matter its due weight. Even painters have misleadingly portrayed him as fleshless and dark-hued, of a saturnine temperament. In support of this view, we have arguments which claim that the Prince was overborne by the great pressure of his Herculean task of revenge; he does not act because he felt he had not the ability to cope. However, the inconsistency between his thoughts and chronic inertia ~~was better explained by his "too too solid flesh."~~ The inertia of fat could not be overcome except under extraordinary provocation, and then, the sudden impulse subsided, mastered by the chronic habit of laziness.

The first scene gives us an intimation of Hamlet's physical temperament. The Ghost's preliminary stalking and his appearing to officers of the guard suggests a certain grossness of material texture in the Prince not present, for example, in Horatio. The royal Dane required a better attuned medium to put him *en rapport* with his father's spirit. Hamlet's later frenzied outburst of passion, "While memory holds a seat in this distracted globe," is further evidence of his corpulence and rotundity. Ophelia points to this characteristic physical development in her sad description of his demeanor in her closet: "He raised a sigh so piteous and profound as it did seem to shatter all his bulk." (Medical men indicate frequent sighing as a sign of heart-disease, caused by superfluous fat.)

As with Ophelia, none of the other characters make a comment which would hint at a thin frame for the Prince. In fact, they seem to draw attention to his bulk. Claudius drinks to his "better breath;" Horatio warns him that he will lose the wager, as he is not fit; and Gertrude solicitously offers to wipe his perspiring brow during the duel. It was surely from experience that Hamlet spoke of "sweating and grunting under a weary life."

The medley of the last scene is all brought about by the management of other heads and hands, thus proving that the Prince is *imprisoned in the walls of adipose*. He demonstrates here that he is preeminently a man of words, the most prolific moralizer in Shakespeare, and thus all practical manhood is allowed to ooze out of him.

To prove that Shakespeare meant to show us in *Hamlet* how the body may clog the aspiring mind, we need only look to the characters in his other works. We find that leanness is an element of the executive man, while fatness marks the dilatory and procrastinating personage. All of Falstaff's flesh could not keep in a little life, nor could it make him an honest man. Caesar would have such men around him, recognizing the improbability of a fat man actually carrying out a treasonable act. Macbeth, Richard III, Henry V, and Hotspur were not obese, and they did the things they planned to do. They did not stop to "breathe" themselves in the manner of Hamlet. "The fat man may be greedy and avaricious like Cardinal Wolsey, or witty and sensual like old Jack, or brooding and melancholy like Hamlet; but he who can vault into his saddle 'like feathered Mercury' will ever win the day by action."

## DISSERTATION DIGEST

(This abstract was prepared by the author especially for *The Shakespeare Newsletter*.)

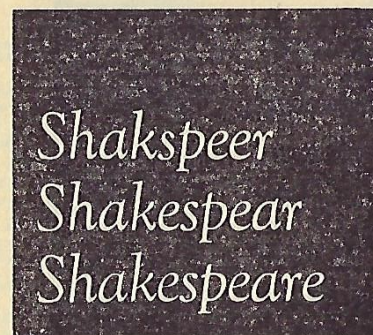
John F. Andrews, "The Pavier Quartos of 1619—Evidence for Two Composers," *Vanderbilt University*, 1971, pp. 435. Advisor: J. Leeds Barroll.

The guiding purpose of this dissertation is twofold. Its first aim is to demonstrate that the ten quarto reprints produced in Jaggard's printing shop in 1619—the notorious Pavier quartos—were not all type-set in their entirety by a single compositor (the First Folio's Compositor B) as an earlier study by William S. Kable has asserted, but rather that two compositors shared the labor. Compositor B and a second compositor who seems distinguishable from Jaggard's other four previously identified compositors (A, C, D, and E) and is therefore here denominated Compositor F. Its second aim is to demonstrate some new criteria for compositorial discrimination that may be of use in determining with greater accuracy and confidence precisely which pages in the First Folio were set up by Compositor B and which pages, if any, were set up by the newly isolated Compositor F. Eventually this information should prove of value to editors and critics working with the Folio texts affected.

After two introductory chapters explaining the rationale of compositorial investigation and surveying the major contributions of such scholars as Charlton Hinman, D. F. McKenzie, William S. Kable, and Madeleine Doran, this study devotes five chapters to a minute analysis of the Pavier quarto of *King Lear* (Q2), confirming Madeleine Doran's 1931 hypothesis that the first eight quires and the last three quires of the text were set up by different compositors and supplementing her criteria with several other kinds of evidence to yield a total of nine general criteria for compositorial discrimination in the Pavier quartos. Of these criteria the strongest are based on (1) contrasting spelling patterns, (2) contrasting punctuation patterns, (3) contrasting patterns in the placement and punctuation of marginal stage directions, (4) contrasting patterns in the use of italics to print proper nouns, (5) contrasting patterns in the use of syllabic word alterations in such a way as to influence the meter, (6) contrasting patterns in the alignment of prose and verse passages, and (7) contrasting patterns involving the introduction of certain kinds of substantive alterations in the language of the text. An eighth chapter follows, in which criteria based on spelling, punctuation, placement and punctuation of marginal stage directions, and italicization of proper nouns are employed to attribute pages in the other nine Pavier quartos to the two compositors identified in Q2 *King Lear*.

It is eventually concluded that Compositor B set up only about a third of the 631 pages of the Pavier quartos, whereas the second compositor (F) set up the other two-thirds. More specifically, it is concluded that Compositor B set up one quarto entirely by himself (*Sir John Oldcastle*), Compositor F set up four quartos entirely by himself (*Pericles*, *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), and the two compositors shared the typesetting of the remaining five quartos (2 *Henry VI*, 3 *Henry VI*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *King Lear*, and *Henry V*), working alternate stints most of the time but apparently working simultaneously at some points.

In the light of this dissertation, two important earlier studies need to be re-examined: D. F. McKenzie's "Compositor B's Role in *The Merchant of Venice* Q2 (1619)," *Studies in Bibliography*, 1959, and William S. Kable's "Comprehensive Analysis of the Spellings of Jaggard's Compositor B in the Pavier Quartos" (a 1966 Virginia dissertation that was summarized in *SB*, 1968, and published in its entirety as *Shakespeare Studies Monograph II* in 1970). It is also likely that the findings in this dissertation will have a bearing on the evidence assembled in Hinman's *Printing and Proof-reading of the First Folio* (1963). (Prof. Andrews is now on the faculty of Florida State University, Tallahassee, 32306.)



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