

# **NOTES ON SHAKSPERE'S VERSIFICATION**

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Notes on Shakspere's versification by George H. Browne

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**GEORGE H. BROWNE**

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SHAKSPERE'S  
VERSIFICATION**



0 Clara P. Briggs  
Freeport, Me., Nov. 30, 190

ON

# SHAKSPERE'S VERSIFICATION

WITH APPENDIX ON THE VERSE TESTS, AND A  
SHORT DESCRIPTIV BIBLIOGRAPHY

BY

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## NOTE.

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THE following notes were hastily put together, just before an examination, for the purpose of supplying my own pupils with a concise orderly summary of the main features of Shakspeare's Versification, and were preserved with the hope that in future classes I might be relieved of unnecessary expenditure of time upon what is a secondary, but by no means unimportant, subject in teaching Shakspeare.\* A few extra copies were printed from a desire to share the possibilities of this relief with other teachers, who, deploring the unscientific statement and chaotic 'arrangement' of existing works on the subject, may likewise have been forced unwillingly to omit the subject altogether. Of course, whatever value an outline like this may have will depend mainly upon the accuracy and effectiveness of the illustrations. The most useful portion of the little pamphlet, therefore, will prove to be the blank pages, which have been inserted for the reader to record his own examples on and to correct any misquotations which may have escaped the very careful revision at the University Press.

G. H. B.

CAMBRIDGE, February, 1884.

\* It is needless to say that I have drawn freely from *Abbott's Shakespearean Grammar* and *Bell's Early English Pronunciation*. Further illustrative matter may be found in those works; also in *W. Smedley Walker's Versification of Shakespeare* (London 1854); and in his *Critical Examination of the Text of Shakespeare*, 3 vols. (London, 1860). *O. Balthasar's Changes in Shakespeare's Versification* (1857) is now out of print. The student of phonetics needs not to be reminded of the immense advantage familiarity with the "phonetic point of view" gives a student of prosody; nor the teacher of language phonetically, of the impossibility of effectively substituting arbitrary symbols for oral instruction. Some gain, however, may perhaps be made by following up, in the books quoted in the notes, the hints there thrown out. The best general work is *Sievers' Grundsätze der Phonetik* (Leipzig, 1881). The first chapter of *Brown's Englische Philologie* (Heilbronn, 1881) contains excellent statements and criticisms of the best works on general phonetics from *Merkel and Brücke* to *Henry Sweet*. *Sweet's Handbook of Phonetics* (London, 1877) is the most available book in English. (*Melville Bell* is already antiquated.) The latest and best summary of the main features of this youngest of the modern sciences is in an article by *Moritz Trautmann*, *Anglia*, I. 188-198. More especially applicable to the points brought up in these notes is an excellent article by the same on the r sounds in English, in *Anglia*, III. 200. Those who still look with suspicion upon the intrusion of "phonetics," and shrink from "phonetic spellings" (even in illustrations) because they lack dictionary authority, are most respectfully referred to the *New English Dictionary*, the first part of which has recently been published.

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## SHAKSPERE'S VERSIFICATION.

"The English heroic verse is usually stated to consist of ten syllables: it is better divided into five groups, each of which theoretically consists of two syllables, of which the second only is accented. . . . Practically, many of the groups are allowed to consist of three syllables, two of them being unaccented.\* . . . The number of syllables may therefore be greater than ten,† while the accents may be, and most generally are, less than five.‡ . . . If there be an accent at the end of the third and fifth group, or at the end of the second and fourth, other accents may be distributed almost at pleasure.§ The last group may also have one or two unaccented syllables after its last accent." — ELLIS, *Essentials of Phonetics*, p. 77 (1847).||

Now Shakspeare's Sonnets are remarkably melodious, and conform to the strictest rules of rhythm and metre. The dramatic poetry, on the other hand,

\* "The limit of trisyllabic substitution is three feet out of five." — J. B. MAYOR, *Phil. Soc. Trans.*, 1875-76, p. 412.

† "A verse may often have more than ten syllables, and more or less than five accents, but it must carry so much sound as shall be a satisfactory equivalent for ten syllables, and must have its accents arranged so as to content an ear prepared for five." — J. A. SIMMONS, *Fortnightly Review*, Dec., 1874.

‡ Abbott (468 a) states that about one line in three has the full number of emphatic accents; about two in four have four, and one out of fifteen, three. It is of more importance to remember, (1.) that the first foot almost always has an emphatic accent; (2.) that two unemphatic accents rarely, if ever, come together; and (3.) that there is generally an emphatic accent on the third or fourth foot.

§ "The true rule, I suspect, is that you may invert the place of the accent (substitute — — for — —) in any group except the last, provided you don't do it in two together." — F. J. FURNIVAL, *N. S. A. Soc. Trans.*, 1874, I. 27.

|| *C. E. Eng. Pron.*, p. 333 (1869): "In the modern verse of five measures, there must be a principal stress on the last syllable of the second and fourth measures, or of the first and fourth, or of the third and some other measure. There is also a stress upon the last syllable of the fifth measure, but if any one of the three conditions above stated are satisfied, the verse is complete."

<sup>1</sup> "Is it not better to allow that three out of the five feet may be — —, without laying down the law as to the order in which they may come? If I were disposed to make any more definite rule, I should prefer to say that in general it would be found that the fifth, and either the second or third foot, had the final accent." — J. B. MAYOR, *Phil. Soc. Trans.*, 1876, p. 452.

<sup>2</sup> "The chief defect in the rules is in regard to the fifth measure. The general condition is that the last syllable should not be weaker than the preceding syllable or syllables, and that, when it is actually weaker, it should be at least longer or heavier." — ELLIS, *ib.* p. 464.





Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition:  
By that sin fell the angels; how can man, then,  
The image of his maker, hope to win by 't? H<sup>3</sup> iii. 2. 441.\*

3. Two extra syllables are sometimes allowed, if unemphatic, before a pause, especially at the end of the line. (These, however, are usually contracted (cf. III. 5, 6, 7, etc., below); there are of course but five accents. Vid. 2, note, and cf. V., below.)

Look where he comes! not poppy nor mandrágora. O. iii. 3. 330.  
Is not so *estimable*, *profitable* neither. M. V. i. 3. 167.  
Peruse the letter. Nothing almost sees *miracles*  
But misery. K. L. ii. 2. 172; *Ib.* i. 1. 225.  
I dare avouch it, sir; what, fifty *followers*? *Ib.* ii. 4. 240.  
As you are old and *reverend*, you should be wise. *Ib.* i. 4. 261.  
Age is *unnecessary*; on my knees I beg. *Ib.* ii. 4. 157.

So, *mánacles*, Cor. i. 9. 57; *vérité*, *Ib.* v. 2. 18; *jéalousy*, H<sup>3</sup> v. 2. 491; *récompense*, T. C. iii. 3. 8; *follow her*, A. Y. iii. 5. 49; *dicéd*, Cor. i. 9. 52; *unmánnérly*, K. L. i. 1. 147.

## II. ACCENT.†

1. Some words, mostly disyllabic, especially verbs, have the accent farther back than at present. — ANSBOR, *Gr.*, 492; ELLIS, *E. Eng. Pron.*, 930, 931.

The gentle archbishop of York is up  
With well-appointed powers. 2 H<sup>4</sup> i. 1. 119.  
I talk not of your soul: our *compelled* sins  
Stand more for number than account. M. M. ii. 4. 57.  
My *conceal'd* lady to her *cancell'd* love. R. J. iii. 3. 98.  
Good even to my ghostly *confessor*. R. J. ii. 6. 21.  
Let it work;  
For 't is the sport to have the *engineer*  
Hoist with his own *petar*. H. iii. 4. 203.  
So, *pioneer*, *Ib.* i. 5. 163; *mátners*, Cor. i. 1. 255.  
Labiennus hath with his Parthian force  
Extended Asia from *Euphrates*. A. C. i. 2. 106.

\* Not Shakspeare's. The enumeration of these redundant syllables in H<sup>3</sup> enabled Mr. Spedding, as early as 1860, to separate Fletcher's work from Shakspeare's. Vid. *N. Sh. Soc. Trans.*, I., Appendix, p. 14.

† While it may not be necessary, even for critical students, to read a permanent classic like Shakspeare with his own pronunciation (which is now fairly well made out, cf. ELLIS, *E. Eng. Pron.*, Cap. VIII. § 5), it is important for all to read him metrically; and when we do aright, we find, not that Shakspeare himself *changed* the accent "for the sake of the metre," but that since his time the regular accent of many words *has changed*. So with the resolutions, so called; it is we moderns who have done the changing, by reading as one syllable what in Shakspeare's time was two. And no observing student can fail to notice in the spoken language of modern poetry many *sturd* contractions and other apparent irregularities of Shakspeare's verse. It is when we try to print them that they seem "forced and unnatural."

So your sweet hue, which methinks still doth stand,

Hath motion. Son. 114. (Walker, LVII.)

Than twenty silly-ducking observants. K. L. ii. 2. 109.

Ay, do, perséver, counterfeit sad looks. M. N. D. iii. 2. 237.

So, H. i. 5. 162; perséverance, Mch. iv. 3. 93.

At Péntapólis the fair Tháisa. P. v. 3. 4.

Cf. délectable, R<sup>2</sup> ii. 3. 7; détestable, K. J. iii. 4. 29; hórizon, 3 H<sup>6</sup> iv. 7. 81; implóratórs, H. i. 3. 129; máintain, 1 H<sup>6</sup> i. 1. 71; máture, K. L. iv. 6. 228; plébeians, Cor. v. 4. 39; A. C. iv. 12. 34; mánkind, T. of A. iv. 1. 40; pérspective, A. W. v. 3. 48; pársuit, Son. 143; párvoyor, Mch. i. 6. 22; réceptacle, R. J. iv. 3. 39; rélapse, H<sup>2</sup> iv. 3. 107; súccessors, H<sup>2</sup> i. 1. 60.

2. Some words have the accent nearer the end than with us now. ("Latin [French] dissyllabic derivatives are oxytone." BEN JONSON.) — ABBOTT, 490; ELLIS, 930, 931.

I say without characters fame lives long. R<sup>3</sup> iii. 1. 81; H. i. 3. 59.

Mark our contract; mark your divorce, young sir. W. T. iv. 4. 428; T. ii. 1. 151.

Our wills and fates do so contrary run. H. iii. 2. 221.

And world's exile is death: then banishéd. R. J. iii. 3. 29.

That no revénue hath but thy good spirits. H. iii. 2. 63.

Banish't this frail sepúlchre of our flesh. R<sup>2</sup> i. 3. 194. Cf. K. L. ii. 4. 134.

By heaven, she's a dainty one, sweetheárt. H<sup>2</sup> i. 4. 94.

As 't were triúmphing at mine enemies. R<sup>2</sup> iii. 4. 91.

Cf. abjéct, R<sup>2</sup> i. 1. 106; aspéct, A. C. i. 5. 33; R<sup>2</sup> i. 1. 155; commérce, T. C. i. 3. 105; compáct, J. C. iii. 1. 215; cornér, 3 H<sup>2</sup> iv. 5. 6; edíct, 2 H<sup>6</sup> iii. 2. 258; explóits, H<sup>2</sup> i. 2. 121; instíct, Cor. v. 3. 35; obdúrate, M. V. iv. 1. 8; oppórtune, T. iv. 1. 26; porténts, O. i. 2. 45; J. C. ii. 3. 59; preséñce, J. C. i. 3. 199; síníster, H<sup>2</sup> ii. 4. 85; triúmph, 1 H<sup>2</sup> v. 4. 14; welcóme, R<sup>2</sup> ii. 3. 170.

3. A word repeated in the same verse often has two accents the first time, and one the second; or occupies a whole bar the first time, and only part of a bar the second; and *vice versá*, according to emphasis.

These violént desires have vi-olént ends. R. J. ii. 6. 9.

Stí-ll so crú-él? Stíll so constant, lord. T. N. v. 1. 113. Cf. IV. 1. b.

Of greatest justice. Wri-ye, wríte, Rinaldo. A. W. iii. 4. 29. Cf. IV. 2. a.

Field, Marcus, yí-eld. Hé-ar mé one word. Cor. iii. 1. 215. Cf. IV. 1. a. 2.

Give me that: pá-tience, pa-tí-ence I need. K. L. ii. 4. 274.

*Théréfóre* and *whérefóre* sometimes have two accents; never *whérefore*.

How cam'st thou hither, tell me and wheréfóre. R. J. ii. 2. 62; K. L. ii. 4. 106.

Make haste, theréfóre, sweet love, whilst it is prime. Son. 70.

4. Some words have a double accent.

Try what repentance can; what can it not?

Yet what can it, when one cannot repent? H. iii. 3. 65.