DR. JOHNSON'S Preface to his edition of Shakespeare is probably his greatest single critical pronouncement and a splendid example of his prose style. And it is, of course, a landmark in Shakespearean criticism. Although some scholars are doubtless aware of the existence of proof-sheets of this famous Preface with Johnson's corrections there has been no published account of them, and it may be hoped that a rather full examination will be welcomed.

It must be stated initially and regretfully that the proof-sheets are not complete nor final. They cover two signatures only, somewhat less than half of the entire Preface. The signatures, in eights, are complete; the first is signed A; the second, a. The two signatures cover exactly the same amount of material (to the very catchword) covered in the first two signatures of the published Preface, evidence that Johnson had the compositor constantly in mind as he revised. That there were proofs later than the ones now under examination is readily demonstrable by comparison of the extant proofs with the published Preface. The published Preface has 'exciting laughter' ([A6]r) instead of the 'exciting merriment' of the proofs, and 'alterations of exhibition' ([A6]r) instead of 'vicissitudes of exhibition'. Neither of the readings of the published Preface appears as a marginal correction in the proofs, obvious evidence that there was at least one further set of proofs which bore these and other revisions.

1 Professor James L. Clifford of Columbia University called them to my attention and procured microfilms of them for me. The originals are in the possession of the John Rylands Library (English MS. 653).
2 References are to the Preface as it appears in the first edition. The edition was published five times during Johnson's life, and there are changes in the Preface in every edition.
3 For the sake of convenience I use a single bracket for an unsigned leaf even though the signatures on signed leaves appear in brackets in the published Preface.
We do not, then, have the full story of the various changes that Johnson made in his Preface before he was content to let it be published.

A number of the differences, both marked and unmarked, between the published Preface and the proof-sheets are of relatively minor importance and can be dismissed with a mere cataloguing. There are a few spelling changes, the latter of the following spellings obtaining in the proofs: 'ancients' for 'antients', 'unpractised' for 'unpracticed', and Palmerin for Palmeria. None of these spellings has been corrected in the proofs. Although most instances of changes in punctuation are not the result of corrections to be found in the proofs there are a few marginal corrections which show Johnson's concern for punctuation, and I suspect that more of the changes in punctuation would be shown to be his rather than those of an interfering compositor with the discovery of later proof-sheets. The first marginal note in the proofs points to the thoroughness with which Johnson went over them. At the bottom of the first page of these proofs there appears the notation 'q. Signature',¹ 'q.' obviously standing for 'query'. The first signature in the proofs is an unbracketed A; the signatures in the published Preface are all bracketed. Johnson seems to have thought that there already was a signature A in the first volume; actually there is none as we now have it.

Considerations of greater interest are the verbal changes and substitutions that Johnson made. The first readings in the following list are those of the published Preface; the notations 'Corrected' or 'Uncorrected' beside the second readings indicate whether Johnson made the corrections in these proofs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original</th>
<th>Corrected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>But love is only</td>
<td>But love is but</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as it acts in</td>
<td>as it is in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exciting laughter</td>
<td>exciting merriment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alterations of exhibition</td>
<td>vicissitudes of exhibition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whatever lighter pleasure</td>
<td>whatever merriment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is not much</td>
<td>There is not a much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yet soon fading</td>
<td>but soon fading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>this poet</td>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>through right and wrong</td>
<td>through good and evil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>loosely formed</td>
<td>slightly formed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Although one might doubt Johnson's concern with such matters as signatures, the hand in this note is his.
He omits opportunities [B]r
<strike>catastrophe is improbably [B]r</strike>
loves of Theseus and Hippolyta combined [B]r
pleasantry licentious [B]r
of that severity [B2]r
been always some modes of gayety [B2]r
performance seems constantly [B2]r
In narration he affects [B2]r
progress of the action [B2]r
found it an encumbrance [B2]r
joint authority [B3]r
resign him [B3]r
that he sees [B4]r
calenture of the brains [B5]r
imitation [B5]r
auditor of a drama [B6]r
We may reasonably suppose [B6]r
and as the unities [B6]r
display all the orders [B7]r
to copy nature [B7]r
what I have here not dogmatically but [B7]r
I am almost frighted [B7]r
the wall [B7]r
rate his native force [B7]r
The publick was gross [B8]r
who then aspired [B8]r
of writings [B8]r
made known to [B8]r
His stories [B8]r

He often opportunities (Corrected) ¹
<strike>catastrophe is often improbably (Corrected)</strike>
<strike>lives of Theseus and Hippolyta are combined (Both Corrected)</strike>
merriment licentious (Corrected)
of severity (Corrected)
been some modes of gayety ²
performance seems always (Uncorrected)
progress of the fable (Corrected)
found it ungraceful (Corrected)
united authority (Corrected)
resign them (Corrected)
that he saw (Uncorrected)
calenture of the head (Corrected)
imitations (Uncorrected)
auditor of a play (Uncorrected)
It is reasonable to suppose (Uncorrected)
and the unities (Uncorrected)
display the orders (Uncorrected)
to display nature (Uncorrected)
what I have now, not dogmatically, but (Uncorrected)
I am now almost frighted (Uncorrected)
the walls (Uncorrected)
raise his hopes (Uncorrected)
The publick was yet gross (Uncorrected)
who aspired (Uncorrected)
of his writings (Uncorrected)
made known by (Uncorrected)
His plots (Uncorrected)

Examination of the context in which these changes appear indicates that Johnson was particularly anxious to avoid verbal repetition. He carried this to such extremes that we see him substituting 'joint authority' ([B3]r) for 'united authority' because, presumably, 'united' is 'cognate' with 'unities', the subject of the paragraph in which these words appear. In two instances ([B3]r and [B4]r) we find him correcting grammatical errors. Certain substitutions can be attributed to his desire for the exact word: 'an encumbrance' for 'ungraceful', 'calenture of the brains' for 'calenture of the heads', and 'the action' for 'the fable'. These and the many other similar changes bear witness to the care with which Johnson revised the Preface before publication.

¹ I assume that Johnson originally wrote 'often omits' and sacrificed 'often' out of consideration for the compositor.
² Johnson corrects the proofs by indicating the insertion of 'always' after 'gayety'.
'The stream of time, which is continually washing the dissoluble fabricks of other poets, passes without injury by the adamant of Shakespeare' is one of the more familiar and often-quoted sentences of the Preface ([A8]). It had originally read: 'The stream of time, which is continually shattering the frail cement of other poets ...'. Thanks to the proof-sheets we have the opportunity of comparing Johnson's first, and rejected, version of this famous sentence with the final version as we now have it. This change is not, however, the most extensive Johnson made. Compare the following; the first readings are those of the published Preface:

The interchanges of mingled scenes seldom fails to produce the intended vicissitudes of passion. Fiction cannot move so much, but that the attention may be easily transferred; and though it must be allowed that pleasing melancholy be sometimes interrupted by un­welcome levity, yet let it be considered likewise ([A6]).

When the imagination is recreated by a painted landscape, the trees are not supposed capable to give us shade or the fountains coolness; but we consider, ([B6])

Agencourt. A dramatick exhibition . . .

([B6], 1.10)

A play read, affects the mind like a play acted.

([B6], 1.18)

Our authour's plots are generally ([B8])

It is not common to be so much moved by fictitious calamities, but that the attention may be immediately transferred to different objects; and though it must be allowed that the mind may be sometimes interrupted in a state of pleasing melancholy, yet it must likewise be considered (Uncorrected).

The imagination is recreated by a painted landscape, not that the trees are supposed to give us shade, or the fountains coolness; but that we consider (Uncorrected) Agencourt. A play read, affects the mind, like a play acted. A dramatick exhibition . . . (Uncorrected)

It is well known, that his plots are generally (Uncorrected)

This last change was probably made for considerations of grammar, 'his' in the proof-sheets appearing in the first sentence of a paragraph and lacking an antecedent.

There are a few marginal notations in the proof-sheets which, because the corrections they call for are not found in the published Preface, lead me to suspect that the version we have may not represent the final version as Johnson intended us to have it. Of course, unless the later proof-sheets (there may even have been more than two sets), unfortunately missing, turn up this suspicion cannot be finally verified. The first correction is one of punctuation, Johnson indicating that 'determine; the' ([B2]) should be changed to 'determine. The'. This seems relatively unimportant, but the identical change, making two sentences of one, is characteristic of Johnson's method of revision, occurring time
after time in his revision of his *Adventurer* essays \(^1\) and in his text of Shakespeare. A second correction, again of punctuation, calls for the capitalization of ‘histories’ ([B3])\(^1\), which remains uncapitalized in all subsequent editions. A third correction, like the first, is one which I feel sure Johnson intended for his final version. The Preface’s ‘be represented’ ([B5])\(^1\) also appears in the proof-sheets but is there corrected to ‘be shown’. It is significant, in light of the many times that Johnson changed a word to avoid repetition, that ‘are represented’ should appear in the same sentence in which one finds ‘be represented’. A fourth, and final correction points to the substitution of ‘a’ for ‘the’ in the words ‘essential to the fable’ ([B6])\(^1\).

The Preface was almost surely the last part of the edition to be written. When one remembers how long the public had been waiting for the edition and how many times Johnson disappointed it after having promised publication one is struck by the care with which he revised the Preface. Despite much learned opinion to the contrary, Johnson’s edition of Shakespeare is not a work worthy of his powers, and it is a tribute to him, I feel, that he did not immediately wash his hands of the whole somewhat annoying business by consigning the first draft of the Preface to the printer, at the same time thanking God he was done. But then Johnson was writing one of the two things at which he himself said he excelled.

\(^1\) I am preparing an article on Johnson’s revision of these essays.