

William Shakespeare: Romeo and Juliet. Ed. by RENÉ WEIS. (= The Arden Shakespeare, Third Series) London: Methuen Drama 2012. xviii, 451 pp.

René Weis's Arden 3 edition of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (2012) has all the features of a modern, up-to-date, useful, usable, and reader-friendly edition. This review discusses the edition's text, introduction, commentary, and appendices and comments in more detail on a few specific points.

The text

Romeo and Juliet exists in two substantive versions: the First Quarto (Q1, 1597) and the Second Quarto (Q2, 1599). As with any multiple-text Shakespeare play, an editor needs to take a stance on the textual debate. Although the earlier quarto has risen in scholarly esteem in the last few decades, the 1599-text is still preferred by editors. Hence, Weis's decision is largely conservative: perhaps unsurprisingly, he bases his edition on Q2.¹ Yet since "Q1's readings carry considerable authority", he incorporates "a number of them" (p. 115), most prominently nearly all of Q1's stage directions. Although Weis does pay tribute to the textual problem of *Romeo and Juliet*, his edition is basically a conflated one. This need not be negative. In an overview on modern editorial problems, pitfalls, and prejudices, Lukas Erne has noted that "the editorial intervention with which Shakespeare is mediated to us is basically beneficial".² This view can also be adopted for Weis's edition, where textual issues are repeatedly discussed, both in the commentary and the introduction. Weis equates Q1 with "an early acting version"³ and Q2 with Shakespeare's "foul papers" (p. 303).⁴ Hence Shakespeare's manuscript version of *Romeo and Juliet* is repeatedly referred to.⁵

Apart from such text-based choices, an important editorial decision for an editor of *Romeo and Juliet* concerns the characters' speech headings, more specifically those of the protagonists' mothers. Weis follows Jill L. Levenson's Oxford edition (2000)⁶ in using the speech prefixes "Capulet's Wife" and "Montague's Wife", whereas his predecessor Brian Gibbons (1980)⁷ still used the traditional "Lady Capulet" and "Lady Montague", as did G. Blakemore Evans in his New Cambridge edition (2003 [1984]).⁸

Introduction

Romeo and Juliet has often been criticized for not being a "real" tragedy, being denied a place among Shakespeare's great tragedies. Yet

Weis writes about Juliet's lines "in her window":⁹ "In their own way they are as radical as anything in *Hamlet* or *King Lear* regarding human selfhood and moral being" (p. 23). His introduction strives to justify this tragedy, which has long occupied a place in the hearts of readers and viewers.

An edition may not be "a manifesto"¹⁰ and an Arden edition probably even less so. Hence Weis's introduction is informative and covers a lot of ground. If there is a red thread running through his edition, it is the play's obsession with time. Weis counts 103 references to time in the play (p. 25). His section on *Romeo and Juliet*'s "tightly plotted and exiguous time-scheme" (p. 27), entitled "Time's winged chariot" (p. 24), occupies ten pages in the introduction.¹¹ Weis provides a detailed list of every scene and the corresponding day of the week and time of day: the play begins on Sunday morning and ends at dawn on Thursday (pp. 25-27).

The introduction is extremely readable and at times immensely enjoyable. The subsections have imaginative subtitles, such as "Earth tremors and thirteen-year-old children" (p. 36), where possible connections between the play and historical events in Shakespeare's life and lifetime are discussed. The introduction includes sections on dating the play, its sources, a history of performance, and the issue of "The texts" (p. 94). The part corresponding to this last section was called "Text", in the singular, in Gibbons's introduction. This aptly illustrates one of the main changes in criticism in the last thirty years: a modern edition must acknowledge that there are not one but (at least) two texts of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Following the Arden general editors' guidelines and the trend in recent critical editions, the section on the play in production ("Performing Love" [p. 52]) is the longest. Its forty-two pages cover not only stage but also film productions and musical adaptations. Special tribute is, for instance, paid to Franco Zeffirelli's stage and film productions (1960, 1968) and to Baz Luhrmann's film (1996), "arguably, the greatest Shakespeare film ever" (p. 88).

There is a small but perhaps pardonable oversight in the performance history: in a footnote, Weis reports that an early German version of *Romeo and Juliet*, entitled *Romio und Julieta*, was performed in 1604 in Nördlingen and in 1626 in Dresden (p. 57). Although the second date is correct, the 1604 reference cannot be related to a confirmed performance; the play was merely mentioned in a repertory list on the given date. Moreover, the text, from which Weis even quotes a

sample passage in translation, cannot be firmly connected to the 1626 performance. The extant manuscript has been dated to 1688.¹² To Weis's defense, scholarship on the topic was not available in English at the time of publication. He relies on Albert Cohn's study from 1865.¹³

Commentary

Like his introduction, Weis's commentary is reader-friendly and repeatedly refers to the topic of time. Each headnote provides the day of the week and the time of day. For instance, for Act 4, scene 4, the headnote reads: "The time stretches from 3 a.m. [...] to dawn [...] on Wednesday". This precise indication is usually supplemented by one of place, in this case "the Capulets' kitchens" (p. 301).¹⁴

One feature of Weis's commentary is occasionally to provide paraphrases instead of more elaborate definitions. This will be of use especially to student readers and to others unfamiliar with early modern English. These glosses are of two kinds. Firstly, there is the paraphrase:

JULIET My only love sprung from my only hate,
Too early seen unknown, and known too late! (1.5.137-38)

The first line is glossed as follows, "Juliet's first and sole love is inspired by someone descended from the only object of hate in her life, the Montagues", and the second line: "She loved at first sight before she knew who he was, and now that she knows she cannot go back" (p. 178). A passage from the so-called balcony scene is similarly paraphrased:

ROMEO [...] Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,
Having some business, do entreat her eyes
To twinkle in their spheres till they return. (2.2.15-17)

Weis reformulates: "Two of heaven's finest constellations are otherwise engaged and therefore ask Juliet's sparkling eyes to replace them temporarily in the firmament" (p. 187).

The second kind of gloss approximates retranslations into modern English in direct speech. For instance, Nurse's line to Juliet "Go thy ways" (2.5.44) is glossed as "Lucky you!" (p. 228). For Romeo's "But soft" (2.2.2) the explanatory note consists of "Hold on, now" (p. 185). Sometimes Weis's language is less colloquial, for example:

ROMEO [...] if the measure of thy joy
Be heaped like mine (2.6.24-25)

Weis here glosses “‘if you have your fill (see *heaped*) of happiness as I do’” (p. 232). Both kinds of annotation seem to be aimed at, and will be appreciated by, a non-specialist audience. They reflect Weis’s refreshingly clear and direct approach to the play.

The editor’s handling of Shakespeare’s bawdy may also be worth a brief discussion. Editors of the Arden First Series had a tendency to skirt around sexual allusions, thereby managing to be “both coy and unhelpful”.¹⁵ Weis, by contrast, cannot be accused of beating around the bush. Take the following sequence:

SAMSON [...] women, being the weaker vessels, are ever thrust to the wall; therefore I will push Montague’s men from the wall and thrust his maids to the wall. (1.1.14-17)

When annotating Shakespeare’s bawdy, editors are treading a fine line. In his 1980 edition, Gibbons writes that “thrust his maids to the wall” should be understood as “an amorous assault” (p. 83). Weis’s note is more elaborate: “The word-play on *wall* deepens into something more sinister than mere social provocation. [...] Samson boasts that he will push the Montague men away from the wall but their women against it, to assault them sexually (hence *thrust* rather than ‘push’)” (p. 125). Weis’s description of sexual aggression is not only more explicit but probably also more to the point than Gibbons’s “amorous assault”. Yet sometimes Weis seems to overshoot the mark:

MERCUTIO [...] for this drivelling love is like a great natural that runs lolling up and down to hide his bauble in a hole.
BENVOLIO Stop there, stop there!
MERCUTIO Thou desirest me to stop in my tale against the hair.
BENVOLIO Thou wouldst else have made thy tale large.
MERCUTIO O, thou art deceived. I would have made it short, for I was come to the whole depth of my tale and meant indeed to occupy the argument no longer. (2.4.88-96)

Gibbons notes, “[b]awdy, quibbling on *tale/tail* (= penis)” and sees another “[b]awdy quibbling on *depth* and *tale*” (p. 147). Weis’s annotation is more elaborate:

Mercutio follows through the innuendos of *bauble* and *hole* (89) with puns on *tale*/'tail', telling Benvolio not to interrupt him now that he is nearly inside his woman. Benvolio’s reply, that Mercutio should not be a bore with an ever longer story (93), is countered by the latter’s retort that, far from pursuing a longer *tale*/'tail', he was looking forward to shortening it by detumescence (as in *made it short*) after penetrating as deeply as he could. (p. 216)

This explicit commentary continues: “Mercutio bawdily quibbles on the meaning of pressing on pubic hair during intercourse” (p. 216). We can see that Weis has no compunctions about calling a spade a spade, although he may be carrying his candor a little too far.

Following today’s tendencies in editing, Weis’s commentary also focuses on the play as an acting text, including references to early modern staging and modern productions and film versions. For example, in his annotation of the *dramatis personae*, he draws attention to Luhrmann’s film, where County Paris “attends the Capulets’ fancy dress party as the all-American astronaut Dave Paris, *Time* magazine’s Bachelor of the Year” (p. 121).

Appendices

In his editorial procedures, Weis explains that “[t]he importance of Q1 for *Romeo and Juliet* scholarship is reflected in the decision to reproduce it in facsimile in Appendix 2” (p. 116). Arguably, there might have been other, and perhaps more useful, ways of reflecting Q1’s importance. The “reduced photographic facsimile of the ‘bad quarto’ in an appendix” (p. xiv) is a standard feature of all Arden 3 multiple-text plays, with the notable and laudable exception of *Hamlet*, which produces all three texts in edited, annotated versions, two of them in a companion volume. Facsimile texts are easily accessible nowadays and may not need to be included in major editions, especially without annotation or collation. In this case, the British Library copy of Q1 *Romeo and Juliet* used for the facsimile is available online free of charge and in breathtaking quality.¹⁶ The images are reproduced in color and can be magnified. The website even allows users to compare Q1 and Q2 online.

In Weis’s appendix, the through line numbering is limited to references at the top of the page. Unlike other Arden 3 editors,¹⁷ Weis does not provide act, scene, and line references keyed to his main text. Such an addition would have helped a reader to engage more with Q1. The marginalia reproduced in the facsimile remains tantalizingly uncommented (pp. 372-73, 395).¹⁸ Students unfamiliar with early modern printed texts may get a general impression of its appearance, layout, and features. Yet a reader looking for a commentary of this Q1 facsimile will have to browse through the annotation of the main text. Anyone in search of an easily accessible text of Q1 *Romeo and Juliet* is better advised to turn to Erne’s Cambridge edition (2007) or, if her primary interest is to compare the two quartos, to Leven-

son's Oxford edition (2000), which includes an edited text of Q1 with minimal annotation.

Other multiple-text plays in the Arden Third Series have received more attentive treatment, first and foremost the two-volume *Hamlet* edition. The editor of *King Lear*, R. A. Foakes, follows a different strategy. He "seeks to offer the reader such guidance towards following both Quarto and Folio texts as can be presented in printing the play as a single work".¹⁹ Foakes used the following editorial device: "words and passages found only in the Quarto are framed in this edition by superscript ^Q, and words and passages found only in the Folio by superscript ^F" (p. 149). The texts of *King Lear* admittedly differ more from each other than the texts of *Romeo and Juliet* do. Moreover, *King Lear* was the first multiple-text play to be granted detailed scholarly attention and therefore still enjoys more prominence than its peers. Nevertheless, one may have wished for a similarly imaginative treatment of the two texts of *Romeo and Juliet* in a new edition.

The remaining appendices in Weis's edition include a list of the "significant Q1 readings" (p. 339) and Q4 readings adopted, a list of rhymes in *Romeo and Juliet*, and a casting chart. The volume contains eighteen illustrations, fourteen of which are pictures or photos of performances; the others are facsimiles of the title pages of the two quartos, a facsimile of a page from Q1, and a playbill from 1756. This selection illustrates Weis's focus on performance. An assiduous reader may notice a few minor oversights in layout and proofreading, but these do not distract from an otherwise successful edition.

Setting aside the perhaps debatable treatment and use of Q1, Weis's edition of *Romeo and Juliet* is useful and easily accessible for the modern reader. His introduction includes a handy overview of the historical and textual context, and a detailed discussion of the play's performance history, while his commentary is both erudite and straightforward.

Berlin

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Notes

- 1 Weis follows the common editorial procedure of reprinting a passage from Q1 (1.2.51-1.3.35). All references to *Romeo and Juliet* are to the reviewed edition.
- 2 Lukas Erne: *Shakespeare's Modern Collaborators*. London 2008, p. 3.
- 3 Yet Weis also believes that instances such as the direction "*Juliet looks after Nurse*" (3.5.235 SD2) "may illustrate the surmised literary [...] pedigree of Q1's [stage directions]" (p. 287).
- 4 This term has been criticized for being anachronistic since "foul papers" did not actually refer to the draft of a complete play in Shakespeare's time (see, for instance,

- Paul Werstine: Narratives about Printed Shakespeare Texts: “Foul Papers” and “Bad” Quartos. In: *Shakespeare Quarterly* 41.1 [1990], pp. 65-86, p. 72).
- 5 To provide just two examples: “*o* and *a* confusion is a known characteristic of Shakespeare’s handwriting” (p. 181) and “Q1’s reading [...] is probably what Shakespeare wrote” (p. 182).
 - 6 William Shakespeare: *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Jill L. Levenson. The Oxford Shakespeare. Oxford 2000.
 - 7 William Shakespeare: *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Brian Gibbons. The Arden Shakespeare. London 1980.
 - 8 William Shakespeare: *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans. The New Cambridge Shakespeare. Cambridge 2003 (1984).
 - 9 He specifically refers to “be but sworn my love, / And I’ll no longer be a Capulet” (2.2.35-36) and the surrounding lines (33-51).
 - 10 William Shakespeare: *Hamlet*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor. The Arden Shakespeare. London 2006, p. 137.
 - 11 Weis is not the first to discuss this issue, as he points out himself (see, for instance, G. Thomas Tanselle: *Time in Romeo and Juliet*. In: *Shakespeare Quarterly* 4 [1964], pp. 349-61).
 - 12 See, for instance, Otto G. Schindler: *Romeo und Julia* auf Schloß Krumau, der *Basilisco* von Kolin und das Armenspital in Kukur: Über böhmische Theaterhandschriften in Wiener Bibliotheken und das Wasserzeichen in Wissenschaft und Praxis. In: *Biblos: Beiträge zu Buch, Bibliothek und Schrift* 44.1 (1995), pp. 81-103.
 - 13 Albert Cohn: *Shakespeare in Germany in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: an Account of English Actors in Germany and the Netherlands and of the Plays Performed by them during the Same Period*. New York 1971 (1865).
 - 14 Although the Arden general guidelines encourage this practice (p. xiii), not all recent editors in the Arden Shakespeare series indicate a time and location for each scene.
 - 15 Helen Wilcox, qtd. in Lukas Erne: *Shakespeare’s Modern Collaborators*. London 2008, p. 47.
 - 16 Shakespeare in Quarto: Comparing the Texts. *British Library*. Web. 15 Dec. 2012. <http://special-1.bl.uk/treasures/SiqDiscovery/ui/search.aspx>.
 - 17 See, for instance, William Shakespeare: *King Henry V*, ed. T. W. Craik. The Arden Shakespeare. London 1998 (1995); William Shakespeare: *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, ed. Giorgio Melchiori. The Arden Shakespeare. Walton-on-Thames 2000; William Shakespeare: *King Henry VI, Part 2*, ed. Ronald Knowles. The Arden Shakespeare. Walton-on-Thames 1999; William Shakespeare: *King Henry VI, Part 3*, ed. John D. Cox and Eric Rasmussen. The Arden Shakespeare. London 2001.
 - 18 On p. 372 the marginalia is not reproduced in its entirety, due to an unfortunate choice of detail for the photograph.
 - 19 William Shakespeare: *King Lear*, ed. R. A. Foakes. The Arden Shakespeare. Walton-on-Thames 1997, pp. 148-49.