Contents

1 *The Text and Early Performances*

Texts

Romeo and Juliet exists in three different texts: the first Quarto (Q1), published in 1597; the second Quarto (Q2), published in 1599; and the first Folio (F), published in 1623. It is, indeed, one of what is now called Shakespeare's multi-text plays, and as is true with all these plays the existence of two or more texts creates challenges for editors, performers, readers, and scholars – and, as will be suggested, opportunities for thinking about performance.

The First Quarto – quarto volumes were created by folding large sheets of paper twice, creating four leaves and eight pages – was published with a title page reading *An Excellent conceited Tragedie of Romeo and Juliet, As it hath been often (with great applause) plaid publiquely, by the right Honourable the L. of Hunsdon his Seruants.* It contains about 2300 lines, making it about 800 lines shorter than Q2. For the first two acts, the words largely parallel those in Q2, although the opening Chorus is 12 lines instead of the familiar 14 of Q2. Starting with scene 13, however, in which Romeo and Juliet meet at Friar Laurence's cell to be married, Q1 often diverges from Q2. While the action is basically the same, many speeches in Q2 have no comparable speeches in Q1, and other speeches appear in Q1 in much reduced form. Particularly striking is the fact that the role of Juliet is 40 per cent shorter (Irace, 1994, p. 185), with major cuts in her soliloquies.

The Second Quarto (1599), entitled *The Most Excellent and lamentable Tragedie, of Romeo and Juliet,* announces that it was *Newly corrected, augmented, and amended: As it hath bene sundry times publiquely acted, by the right Honourable the Lord Chamberlaine his Seruants.* Q2 is about 3100 lines long and provides the versions of Juliet's soliloquies familiar to us

from page and stage. It provides the basic text for modern editions, although part of Q2 (generally considered to be from 1.2.55 to 1.3.37) is based on Q1.

The First Folio of Shakespeare's plays, published in 1623, was put together by John Hemmings and Henry Condell, who were sharers in the company that, when James I became its patron, changed its name from the Lord Chamberlain's to the King's Men. The Folio – a large volume made from sheets folded only once – was published in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death. Scholars agree that the text of *The Tragedie of Romeo and Ivliet* was based on the Third Quarto, perhaps with some editorial work by a member of Shakespeare's company. Thus because Q3 was based on Q2, the Folio text does not serve as the basis for modern editions, but it is consulted for specific word choices. The Folio prints neither version of the first Chorus.

Scholars have devoted intense effort to discovering the origin and authority of the two quarto texts, in part because a clear and simple account of their relative authority might offer rich interpretive rewards. If, for example, Q1 was simply a shorter version of Q2, we might read it as an early draft which Shakespeare expanded as he revised and improved the play, perhaps based on experience in performance, and we could then study the two texts to learn about Shakespeare's process of revision as well as how that revision illuminates the intentions registered in Q2. However, the differences between the two texts are of many different kinds, and during the past 150 years these differences – some of which resemble differences in other multi-text plays such as *The Merry Wives of Windsor, Henry V, Hamlet, Othello,* and *King Lear* – have prompted scholars to offer competing hypotheses about the origins and functions of the two quartos.

For much of the twentieth century, 'the modern orthodoxy' (Levenson and Gaines, 2000, p. x), which is still presented in many scholarly editions of the play, has been to explain what was believed to be the 'corrupt' nature of Q1 by a scenario in which several actors in the company reconstructed the play from memory and, perhaps, their own individual parts, and sold this text to a publisher who paid a printer to issue the play. This hypothesis has seemed to offer a way to explain the discrepancies between what were often spoken of as the earlier 'bad' and the later 'good' quarto: the problems in Q1 were assumed to follow from the fact that the reporters remembered their

own parts clearly, recalled the speeches of characters on stage with them less clearly, and had difficulty in reconstructing dialogue spoken when none of them were on stage. In the case of *Romeo and Juliet*, scholars have proposed the reporters included combinations of Mercutio, Paris, and Romeo. Q2, by contrast, was seen as a good quarto because it was printed from some version of Shakespeare's manuscript – a position that is still generally accepted.

During the last 40 years, however, memorial reconstruction has been challenged by scholars who have sought to discredit the entire hypothesis (Levenson, 2000, pp. 118–20). They have pointed out that there is no concrete evidence of any actor or actors reconstructing a play in the manner described, nor evidence of any play being stolen from the company for which Shakespeare wrote (Werstine, 1990, p. 68). They have also noted that even if several actors reconstructed a playtext such as *Romeo and Juliet*, it would not necessarily have been profitable for a stationer to authorize and a printer to publish such a text, since playtexts generally did not sell well (Blayney, 1997, pp. 388, 412). In addition, they have pointed out problems and contradictions in the analysis offered by the memorial reconstructors. For example, it has been suggested the one reporter was the actor playing Romeo, yet it hardly seems credible that Richard Burbage would have participated in stealing property from the company in which he held a share. Kathleen Irace proposes Mercutio as one of the reporters in order to explain some features of the Q1 text (pp. 126–8), but this raises the question as to why that actor produced what Brian Gibbons – a proponent of memorial reconstruction – derides as a distorted version of his own dying words in Q1 (1980, pp. 6–7). Such problems – and there are many more than can be touched on here – have led Paul Werstine to argue that the first quarto of *Romeo and Juliet* does not meet the rigorous criteria W.W. Greg established when he argued that the actor playing the Host was the reporter of the First Quarto of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1999, pp. 326–7, 332).

As the critique of memorial reconstruction has gained traction, two other hypotheses have (re)emerged. One proposes that Q1 is an abridgment by Shakespeare, by someone else, or by the playwright working with members of his company, and was created for performance on the stage under conditions which demanded a shorter text, although we cannot specify what those conditions might have been. This hypothesis is presented by Jay Halio in his *Guide* to the play,

where he proposes that those who created Q1 sought to maintain the powerful plot while sacrificing some of the poetic dialogue, producing 'a swifter paced drama that loses little of its *dramatic* impact, whatever losses it may sustain in its poetry' (1998, p. 3). However, cutting the text in order to emphasize the plot does not explain some of the major differences between the texts, nor does it explain why the language of the last three acts deviates substantially from Q2. If the aim was to reduce long poetic passages, this might explain why some of Juliet's soliloquies were reduced, but it fails to explain why some of Romeo's long speeches were not, nor does it explain why Mercutio's Queen Mab speech, which seems even less necessary for the plot, remained intact.

The second hypothesis, proposed by Alexander Pope in his edition of Shakespeare's plays (1723–5), suggests that Q2 represents Shakespeare's revision of the draft published as Q1. This hypothesis also encounters problems, including the radical differences in the marriage scene. The contrast is summed up by Lukas Erne who writes that 'Although this scene dramatises the same event as the corresponding one in Q2, the text is almost completely different, as is its tone' (2007, p. 97). Moreover, scholars disagree about the merits of the two scenes: some, like Halio, find the Q1 version obviously inferior, while others, like E.A.J. Honigmann, note that 'many critics think it as good as, or better than, the definitely Shakespearian text' (1965, p. 134).

Finally, even as they argue over the relative quality of the two texts, most scholars have ignored how the scenes differ as blueprints for performance. These differences have been extensively analyzed by Steven Urkowitz (1988, 2008), who delineates the different performance options offered by each text. His work demonstrates that we can use the two texts to stimulate actors and readers to imagine varied realizations of the scenes.

At this point, the editorial argument about the quarto texts of *Romeo and Juliet* seems to have reached an impasse, since no single theory explains all the differences between Q1 and Q2, and each theory is open to fundamental challenges. Fortunately, we do not need to decide between these hypotheses. Rather, we can take advantage of the work of Jill Levenson who, in her Oxford edition, provides modernized versions of both quartos and argues that it is more accurate historically and more productive theatrically to regard them as two exemplars of the play. Read in this way, we can sharpen our perception of each text's unique elements and stimulate our

imagination of how each may be performed. The Commentary works with the text of Q2 produced by Levenson. For other Shakespeare plays I will cite *The Riverside Shakespeare* (1997).

Early performances

While both quartos advertise a play that was publicly acted 'with great applause' (Q1), no record of performance has survived from the years before the Restoration of Charles II in 1660. Yet its popularity is suggested by the fact that, as G. Blakemore Evans notes, 'From 1598 to 1642, allusions to (or lines and passages imitated from) *Rom.* are outnumbered only by those to *Ham.*, *Venus and Adonis* and *1H4*' (2003, p. 1). Any discussion of what audiences in the mid-to-late 1590s witnessed and how they responded must be highly speculative, but it seems probable that three elements must have shaped the play's performance and reception: the roles of the two lovers; the sequence of scenes embodying the forces of love and hate; and the use of key features of the stage to create what became some of the most famous scenes in English drama. These elements continue to make the play successful, even when it is performed on stages quite different from those for which Shakespeare wrote and in mediums such as film and television whose potentials he could not have foreseen.

'Juliet and her Romeo' Simply witnessing a performance will demonstrate that the roles of the young lovers were intended to dominate the action, but Marvin Spevack's *Concordance* adds detail to that experience. By Spevack's count, Q2 includes eight roles of more than 100 lines: Romeo (616), Juliet (541), Lawrence (350), Nurse (280), Capulet (267), Mercutio (262), Benvolio (160), and Lady Capulet (114). Romeo's 616 lines are 19.8 per cent and Juliet's 541 lines are 17.4 per cent of the play, and the fact that together their lines constitute the same percentage of their play as Hamlet's lines constitute of his play suggests that we should see the lovers as a joint protagonist:

> Certainly the evidence of recent productions confirms the view that Romeo and Juliet must be thought of as a pair, to be cast together rather than as distinct individuals. The time the characters spend together on stage is so limited that the audience must instantly be convinced of their all-consuming love; otherwise the production must become unbalanced.
>
> (Holding, 1992, p. 75)

It seems likely that the first actor to perform Shakespeare's Romeo was Richard Burbage, the star of Lord Chamberlain's Men from their formation in 1594 to his death in 1619. If the play was first performed in 1595 or 1596, Burbage would have been 26 or 27 – younger than many famous actors who played Romeo until the second half of the twentieth century. Burbage would already have created comic and tragic protagonists in a number of Shakespeare's plays – good preparation for creating a figure who at first seems to be the protagonist of a romantic comedy before his own choices help enmesh him in a tragic action.

While the largest part belongs to Romeo, it is only the twenty-first longest role in the canon, and the eighteenth longest male role. Juliet, on the other hand, is not only the second largest role in the play but the fifth largest female role in the canon, surpassed only by Rosalind (721 lines), Cleopatra (670 lines), Portia (578 lines), and Imogen (591 lines). If *The Merchant of Venice* was composed after *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet was the longest female role Shakespeare had yet written in a single play, and a major opportunity for a boy actor. The role clearly demands verbal dexterity and emotional power as it moves beyond the range of Shakespeare's earlier comic heroines in Juliet's love scenes, soliloquies, and suicide. If we include her first speech in 2.1 and her final speech in the tomb, Juliet's six soliloquies (in 2.1, 2.4, 3.2, 3.5, 4.3, and 5.3) total 127 lines or just under one quarter of the role; and during the fourth act Juliet must hold the stage without the banished Romeo. Indeed the plot emphasizes Juliet's autonomy as she makes a series of choices in which she encourages Romeo's wooing, proposes marriage to Romeo, consummates that marriage, rejects marriage to Paris, compels the Friar to develop a plan to save her from that second marriage, takes the potion which produces her apparent death and entombment, rejects the Friar's final plan to have her retire to a nunnery after Romeo's suicide, and kills herself in order to be reunited with Romeo. Juliet is at least as much an agent in shaping the lovers' fate as is Romeo.

'Here's much to do with hate' The love-scenes include Juliet and Romeo's initial encounter at the Capulet's feast (1.4); the window or balcony scene, where Juliet proposes marriage (2.1); Juliet's soliloquies (2.4 and 3.2); the scene before their wedding (2.5); their leave-taking, at the end of which Romeo descends from the window (3.5); her soliloquy before drinking the sleeping-potion (4.3); and their

reunion in the Capulet tomb (5.3), where love and hate converge as Romeo kills Paris and each lover commits suicide as the only means to control their destiny. Poised against the love scenes are the scenes in which hatred produces violence, most prominently at the beginning, middle, and end of the play (1.1, 3.1, and, 5.3), and where each violent outbreak prompts the intervention of the Prince. The fight scenes in English Renaissance drama were powerful attractions because some portion of the men in the audience would have been trained in the code of honor and the art of defense. The pivotal mid-day fight would have resonated with many spectators as an example of what could happen on the streets of London, and Shakespeare and some spectators might have known of the encounter in which Christopher Marlowe was challenged by William Bradley and witnessed his fellow poet Thomas Watson kill Bradley in what the coroner determined was an act of self-defense (see Sources).

Balcony, bed, and tomb *Romeo and Juliet* would also have engaged the original spectators because, as Andrew Gurr has noted, this play, like *Titus Andronicus,* made exciting use of the resources of the stage: 'The more substantial features needed as part of the stage design and furniture are the balcony or "window" in 2.1 and 3.5, Q1's "bed within the Curtaine" for 4.3 and 4.4, and the monument in 5.3' (1996, pp. 21–2).

The two window scenes One of the most famous scenes in Shakespeare's plays, the so-called balcony scene was almost certainly performed with Juliet placed in the area above the stage that is better thought of as representing the window of her bedroom, while Romeo, on the main stage, was imagined as situated in the garden of the Capulet mansion. For the second of these scenes, which ends their only night together as a married couple, Q1 directs '*Enter Romeo and Juliet at the window*' (G3ʳ) while Q2 offers '*Enter* Romeo *and* Juliet *aloft*' (H2ᵛ): so both texts direct that the scene begin at the window occupied by Juliet when they arranged their marriage. Q2 adds '*Enter Madame and Nurse*' (H3ʳ) but given that the scene would be radically different if Lady Capulet discovered her daughter in bed with Romeo, and that there is an '*Enter Mother'* on the next page, it seems clear that only the Nurse enters, warns the lovers, and then departs. Q1's '*He goeth downe*' (G3ᵛ), indicates Romeo climbed down by the rope ladder. After his exit, Q1's '*She goeth downe from the window*' (G3ᵛ) suggests Juliet descended the stairs in the tiring house, entered by one of the

doors, and met her mother on the platform, bringing her bedroom with her.

Q1 '*She falls upon her bed, within the curtains*' 'Scholars have suggested three possible original stagings: a curtained bed introduced when the scene begins; a bed situated behind curtains in the discovery space; or a curtained structure projecting from the tiring-house wall. They have also considered the visual foreshadowing that would result if the tomb of 5.3 were located in the space occupied by the bed in this scene and 4.4' (Levenson, 2000, pp. 315–6). The Q1 direction suggests that Juliet fell on the bed after completing her soliloquy and drinking the potion. The bed with Juliet's body could have remained in full view through the discovery and mourning by the Capulets. Once Capulet ordered the Nurse to wake Juliet, she would simply have moved toward the bed.

5.3 The Capulet Tomb The stage directions give only the barest hints about how the Lord Chamberlain's Men staged the final scene. In response to the Q1 direction '*Romeo opens the tombe*' (K^r) Alan Dessen has written 'I may understand *Romeo,* but, after much effort, I still have considerable difficulty with both *opens* and *the tomb*' (1995, p. 176). In addition to Dessen, Richard Hosley (1959), Andrew Gurr (1996), and Leslie Thomson (1995) have demonstrated why the surviving evidence makes it difficult to determine what might have happened during the staging of the play's climax. One way to state the problem is to say that we have too little physical evidence and too much verbal evidence, so that the problem is partly created by the varied terms used by the *dramatis personae*: 'through the finale, it is called a "Vault" or a "grave" seventeen times, against six when it is called a "monument" or "Sepulchre", and six when it is the more neutral "tomb"' (Gurr, p. 24). The combination of these words and the tools brought by Romeo and the Friar can be analyzed in a number of ways. Vault, sepulchre, and monument suggest an above-ground structure, and a crowbar would be a useful implement to force open its doors. A vault could be created using the central opening in the tiring house wall, perhaps with a structure inside with several bodies on display, as suggested in the illustrations by Walter Hodges for the New Cambridge edition of the play. A monument might be a structure pushed onto the stage from the central doors, as may have been done with Juliet's bed. A grave suggests underground burial, and Romeo's mattock and Friar Laurence's spade would seem appropriate to mime digging as they

opened the trap door. However, as Dessen has established by analyzing 30 monument scenes in plays from this period, whatever language is used in the dialogue may refer not to a physical structure but to a fiction created by the dialogue, the props, the actors, and the imagination of spectators. That is, the dialogue may be so precise either because the dramatist wants to underline the action that *is* happening on stage or because he wants to compensate for something that is *not* happening but must be imagined. Finally, it may have been the case that in different venues the Lord Chamberlain's Men employed different stagings.

Exeunt omnes: 'tragedy's chronic problem of removing the bodies' In the theater the ending of a tragedy raises the question of how to stage the 'Exeunt omnes':

> The general rule, firmly identified by Michael Neill, that tragedies commonly closed with a funeral procession that took the corpses offstage, cannot be applied in this play. Such an ending would not serve the closure of *Romeo and Juliet.* You do not take corpses away when the scene is already set in a graveyard. Interring them afresh in existing graves, whether to be covered by the trapdoor or closed off by a curtain, was a simple solution to tragedy's chronic problem of removing the bodies. If all the bodies were expected to be lying inside the trap already, clearing the stage would have been exceptionally easy. (Gurr, p. 25)

The dialogue at the end of *Romeo and Juliet* provides no indication as to how the bodies of Paris, Romeo, Juliet, and, perhaps, Tybalt, were dealt with, not even offering something as simple as Fortinbras' order that Hamlet be carried off by four soldiers or the indication that a dead march be played at the end of *King Lear.* Modern productions develop their own solutions to if or how to get the corpses off stage and how to stage the exit.

Finally, it is also worth repeating that the women's parts were played by boy actors, so that in Shakespeare's time the erotic energies of the play were embodied not in the sort of explicit sexuality that is possible in present day theater but in the language spoken by the lovers. It is that language which first made Romeo and Juliet such compelling embodiments of romantic passion and commitment.

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