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Romeo and Juliet Q1 1597: a quatercentenary reappraisal

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The first edition of *Romeo and Juliet* was issued in quarto format more than 400 years ago (Q1, 1597). But it has been dismissed for decades as a mere memorial reconstruction, by traitor-actors, of the allegedly pre-existing masterpiece published two years later as 'newly corrected, augmented and amended' (Q2, 1599). So those words are freely interpreted as meaning anything but what they plainly imply, namely that Q2 was Shakespeare's own revision of his own first version, Q1. Indeed, the Arden edition (Gibbons, 1980-, under the general editorship of Richard Proudfoot) states as a fact that the quoted words actually mean that Q2 is a replacement of Q1, not a revision of it. As to Q1's title-page assurance that its text had 'been often (with great applause) plaid publicly', this is contemptuously treated, without discussion, as a plain lie. There could be no plainer evidence of self-induced mental paralysis.

That earlier text would interest many people who have no time (in any sense) for scholarly supposition. So this article offers four new tests of Shakespeare's authorship, beginning with the plain but neglected evidence of his six signatures and his three manuscript pages in *Sir Thomas More*. All these sources are widely and quirkily variable; for example the play's first speaker is successively called *Lincolne*, *Linco*, *Linc* and *Lin*. Just such an individual hand has left its fingerprints all over Q2, which introduces its hero as *Romeo*, *Rom* and *Ro*, its heroine as *Juliet*, *Iuli* and *Iu*, and its villain as *Tibalt*, *Tib*, *Tyb* and *Ti*. Other speech-prefixes include *Benuo*, *Ben*; *Capu*, *Cap*, *Ca*; *Frier*, *Fri*; *Mount*, *Moun*; *Nurse*, *Nurs*, *Nur*; *Paris*, *Par*; *Prince*, *Prin*. As the experts explain, such striking variants typify Shakespeare's theatre scripts.

As they do not explain, exactly the same is true of the forgotten Q1, where every single one of those same variants is also found. So prima facie that text too was supplied by and in the same hand. Further, although each Quarto adds its own unique abbreviations, such as *Capo*, *Fr*, *Iul*, *Mont*, *Pry* in Q1 and *Benuol*, *Iule*, *Mounta*, *Pari*, *Ty* in Q2, the variance ratio remains constant. Thus in Q1 as in Q2, the twelve main characters present, in print, some 45 different identity cards. Would any 'traitor-actor' have treated the dramatis personae thus? But there was one actual living person who demonstrably did so, namely Shakespeare himself. So Q1 is also his own work, as further confirmed by common sense as well as the Q2 title-page.

Statistics say the same. Thus the vocabulary of 3881 different words found in Q2 represents no less than 16.22% of its total length in words, a high proportion also found in such middle-period plays as *All's Well That Ends Well* and *The Merchant of Venice*. That ratio is surely an objective index of Shakespeare's verbal inventiveness. But the corresponding figures for *Romeo and Juliet* Q1 are higher still, with a vocabulary of 3272 different words representing fully 18.8% of its length in words. So unless the 'traitor-actors' were verbally more inventive than the young Shakespeare, which seems unlikely on any hypothesis, Q1 was also his own play.

Again, the vocabulary of Q2 is diversified into hundreds of different spellings, such as: *cloudes*, *clouds*, *clowdes*; *mistresse*, *mistris*; *musicke*, *musique*, *musitions*. The experts explain that this too is typical Shakespeare. But then so is Q1, where the same high proportion (over 10%) of the word-stock is variously spelt, including those same examples and some 300 others. Again, therefore, Q1 is a Shakespeare play, printed from authorial copy.

This conclusion is closely conformable with the researches of Emeritus Professor Ernst Honigmann, whose recent book *The Texts of Othello and Shakespearian Revision* contends that the 1622 first edition also incorporates Shakespeare's own spellings and variants. These include *sence*, *shew*, *vertue* instead of *sense*, *show*, *virtue*. Such usages, Professor Honigmann concedes, would not be unusual, taking each word individually. But how many writers, he asks, preferred such alternatives together with all the other strong or occasional preferences listed?

Of the eighty-two specific spellings given, only some forty occur in any form throughout

Romeo and Juliet Q1 1597; but no fewer than twenty-seven of them, including sence, shew and vertue, as well as affoordeth, ake (=ache), beleuee, boord, cald (=called), clime (=climb), comming, eccho, extreames, grones, kitchin, mannage, mary (= marry, exclam.), mistris, moouue, musique, musition, peece (= piece), pittty, prophane, souldiers, suddaine, tearme, Wensday are spelt as in *Othello* Q 1622.

That latter text also exhibits dozens of other idiosyncrasies, such as those defined by Honigmann as (i) the very frequent substitution of *y* for modern *i*; (ii) -oo- for -o-; (iii) the doubling of medial consonants; (iv) *in-* for *en-*; (v) -full for -ful; (vi) typical stage directions, such as 'at a window'. All six categories also occur in *Romeo and Juliet* Q1 1597.

In this context of spellings, upper- and lower-case letters have been treated as equivalent. But capitalisation should be considered separately. The rules that governed it in Tudor times have been well documented (e.g. Partridge 1964 75, though it may not be as clear to all other students of the subject that such initial letters were supplied by 'the printers'). But Partridge (op. cit. 58) himself admits one exception to this unproven rule, namely that Shakespeare himself, writing as Hand D in the insurrection scene from *Sir Thomas More*, exhibited 'a distinct tendency to write initial c as a capital, which Dover Wilson remarks also in the good [sic] Shakespearean quartos'. Though we are not told so straight out, the putative reason is that he wrote thus for the avoidance of doubt, because he knew that his formation of small c tended to be unclear or even illegible. That would completely explain Caue, Cell, Center, Chamber, Cheuerell, Citizens, Closet, Confessor, Corns, Counsellor and so forth in the second edition of *Romeo and Juliet*, which (Gibbons op. cit. 13 ff.) was set up from Shakespeare's own manuscript. But the same words, with the same capitals, also occur in Q1 - with the same explanation?

Not for memorial reconstructionists, who cannot bear the thought that Shakespeare could possibly have penned a 'bad' quarto. They even explain the manifest interdependence of the two texts on the supposition that Q2 was partly printed from a copy of Q1 (Gibbons, op. cit. 17 ff.). But this is just the theory giving evidence in its own defence; there is no objective factual basis for any such hypothesis. Indeed, those who believe that Q1 is a report, which means that no part of it is necessarily Shakespearean at all, cannot without forgetting or even disproving their own theory simultaneously rely upon it in any respect whatever, though of course they all do (v. Gibbons *passim*).

What really needs to be explained is how this reporter came to write exactly like Shakespeare himself, as in (to cite only selected new examples from among the many hundreds that remain on readable record) such shared spellings as: a sleepe, Abbey, bable (= bauble), askt, auncient, banisht, Batcheler, *Capels* (= Capulets), cheare (= cheer), choller (=choler), chuse (= choose), clowdes (= clouds), Cosen (= cousin), daunce, fadome (= fathom), falkners (= falconer's), fier (= fire), flurt (= flirt), hayre (= hair), hower (=hour), hudwinckt (= hooded), hyre (= hire), interd (= interred), least (= lest), mystie (= misty), Orchard, ridling (= riddling), pretie (= pretty), sculls (=skulls), seaze (= seize), sowre (= sour), solie (= solely), stuff (= stuffed), teachie (= tetchy), yfaith (= i'faith), Torch, twinkle, Violl (= vial), Watch, ynch (= ynch), yong (= yong). The self-evident solution, for those not indissolubly wedded to the 'reporter' theory, is that these and all the others are Shakespearean spellings. And indeed even the arch-priests of 'bad Quarto', 'reporter', 'traitor-actor' or 'memorial reconstruction' theories sometimes seem not really quite to believe it themselves, to judge from their own curious periphrases, such as (Gibbons again, 4) 'it is convenient to speak of a "reporter"...though different parts of the play may have been reported by different individuals in the group, while some of the reconstruction may have been collaborative. Presumably the Bad Quarto version was assembled by a group who had been involved in the first authentic production (i.e. of Q2 1599, which is further assumed, again without an atom of evidence, to have been already written and performed long before 1597) and intended to perform the play, with a reduced cast, on a provincial tour (another self-serving supposition for which no evidence has ever existed).

This imaginary 'reporter', furthermore, also acts as a convenient whipping-boy for specialists to exercise their sadistic skills upon, four centuries later. The 'reporter' has misplaced his lines; his confusion crudely damages Shakespeare's tone and mode; his memory, unusually faulty for a professional actor, causes him to reproduce phrases or lines later than 'their proper place'; sometimes he has to compose whole scenes afresh; but he is a pedestrian hack-writer, and in general a low-life no-hoper, except that he writes (Gibbons op. cit. 4-11) remarkably apt and vivid stage directions. One wonders who he could possibly be.