

Introductions, Annotations, and the Electronic Edition
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In his February 15, 2002, welcoming message, R. A. Foakes remarks, “Not much seems to have been written on the topic of the seminar” and then recommends Philip Edwards’s “The Function of Commentary” (1984) and his own “On Finishing a Commentary on *King Lear*” (1997). In addition to the Oxford and Arden 3 guidelines, my research has uncovered a handful of other articles on the topics of introductions and commentaries to critical editions. In his essay, Foakes states that “Notes have to serve various explanatory functions, the main ones being to help the reader to understand textual problems; verbal difficulties; obscure allusions; references to proverbs, to the Bible and other works Shakespeare used; ideas, images and customs no longer familiar; and issues arising in staging the play” (238). The function of explaining “issues arising in staging the play” constitutes a very obvious difference in introductions and commentaries to the New Cambridge, Oxford, and Arden 3 Shakespeares and their preceding multivolume series editions. As Michael Cordner notes in 1996,

THE LAST TWO to three decades have seen a remarkable development of performance-based scholarship in the study of Shakespeare. What are the implications of this for the editor of a Shakespearean play? Both the major new series of single-play editions now in advanced stages of publication – the New Cambridge and the Oxford Shakespeare – are avowedly more responsive to the theatrical dimensions of the texts than their major predecessor and rival, the New Arden series; similar claims are being made on behalf of the latter’s successor, relaunched as Arden 3 in 1995 with a trio of new editions. (289)

This new emphasis on performance realization rather than on characterization is apparent, for example, in Lois Potter's Arden 3 *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, whose introduction is structured:

- The genre: tragicomedy;
- The collaborators;
- The authorship question;
- Collaboration and censorship;
- The date;
- Contexts: public;
- Contexts: literary;
- Contexts: theatrical;
- The play's afterlife; and
- Text.

The "afterlife" section of this edition includes Pre-publication allusions, Publication history, Adaptation and performance before 1900, Twentieth-century productions, and Interpretations; in addition, nine of the sixteen illustrations interspersed throughout the Introduction are production stills. With the exception of staging issues, all of the functions that Foakes identifies in the citation above also apply to introductions and commentary to *The Poems*, which I am currently editing for the Internet Shakespeare Editions <<http://web.uvic.ca/shakespeare/>>. In this short paper, I will confine my remarks to *Venus and Adonis* and specifically to the contributions of feminist theory and to the length of notes as both affect my editing practices.

In 1997, Ann Thompson observes that “editing has been beginning, cautiously, to open up to contributions of literary theory more generally that might (potentially at least) include feminist theory” (86). She then continues, “A feminist editor must interrogate the assumptions made about gender in the text itself and in the previous transmission and elucidation of the texts, drawing on feminist studies of the ways in which Shakespeare has been reproduced and appropriated by patriarchal cultures” (91). No twenty-first century editor of Shakespeare can ignore the immensely rich contributions of feminist criticism to the discipline. I would, in fact, argue that no theoretical praxis in the past thirty-five years has exerted or will continue to exert more influence on Shakespeare studies than feminism (and the related areas of gender studies and queer theory). It is now virtually impossible to read a Shakespeare text without considering feminist issues. Reading from a feminist perspective is especially relevant to *Venus and Adonis*, *Lucrece*, and *A Lover’s Complaint* with the two narrative poems being, at least, principally about their eponymous female protagonists if not told from their points of view while the latter is, in fact, narrated from line 71 to the end by the seduced and abandoned woman herself.

In the *Venus and Adonis* section to my Introduction to *The Poems*, I intend to address past misogynistic characterizations of Venus and to offer my own perspective of the work as an extremely comic and erotic narrative sympathetic to rather than critical of Venus’s predicament. In his 1954 *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama*, C. S. Lewis describes Shakespeare’s Venus as “a very ill-conceived temptress” (498). Lewis expresses even further disgust for Venus in an essay published in 1967:

Venus and Adonis reads well in quotation, but I have never read it through without feeling that I am being suffocated. I cannot forgive Shakespeare for

telling us how Venus perspired (175), how “soft and plump” she was, how moist her hand, how Adonis pants in her face, and so forth. I cannot conceive why he made her not only so emphatically older but even so much larger than the unfortunate young man. She is so large that she can throw the horse’s rein over one arm and tuck the “tender boy” under the other. She “governs him in strength” and knows her own business so badly that she threatens, almost in her first words, to “smother” him with kisses. The word “smother,” combined with these images of female bulk and strength, is fatal: I am irresistibly reminded of some unfortunate child’s efforts to escape the voluminous embraces of an effusive female relative . . . Shakespeare shows us far too much of Venus’ passion as it would appear to a third party, a spectator – embarrassed, disgusted, and even horrified as any spectator of such a scene would necessarily be. (“Hero” 236-7)

In 1959, Don C. Allen portrays Venus as a “caricature of the frustrate lady, flushed and sweating”; “rich with experience”; “a fluttery and apprehensive Doll Tearsheet of forty” (100, 109, 110). In 1962, L. W. Lever, undoubtedly referring to Lewis and Allen, maintains, “Shakespeare, it would seem, viewed her [Venus] as thoroughly absurd, a fat white woman whom nobody loved. Forty years old, fluttery and apprehensive, loquacious and perspiring: such is the impression which the heroine of his first poem has made upon several distinguished scholar-critics” (8). These three positions reveal to me as much if not more about their authors than their subject. I read Venus as a character similar to the narrator of *The Sonnets*, one who is deeply infatuated with a beautiful, self-absorbed young man and whose pursuit of the young man contains episode upon episode

of humor in which we laugh with and not at Venus until her penultimate tragic encounter with the slain Adonis.

Jonathan Crewe in his Introduction to the New Pelican *Narrative Poems* offers an intriguing reading, asserting that both *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* “deal with what would now be regarded as forms of sexual violence and harassment” (xxxiv). He then concedes that “Venus’s harassment of Adonis and Tarquin the Younger’s rape of Lucrece are not symmetrical” and that “the poems differ widely in tone and implication” (xxxiv). Crewe further concedes that “Although Venus’s pursuit of Adonis has been described as a rape in some earlier criticism, and although this pursuit is described in a 1994 psychological journal as an ‘early’ representation of sexual harassment, these characterizations of the poem may seem either melodramatic or humorlessly clinical” (xxxv). Crewe’s point is, nevertheless, that “Refusing to take *Venus and Adonis* seriously may also entail the sexist assumption that while coercive or threatening advances by a man are serious, such advances by a woman, especially an older one, cannot be taken seriously, women being by definition powerless, so to speak, and their desires merely embarrassing” (xxxvii). To me, Crewe is advancing an ahistorical, “presentist” case that is only one of many possible readings. In contrast to Crewe’s approach, Emily Detmer, while acknowledging that many of “Shakespeare’s intended audience” of *The Taming of the Shrew* “would have seen Petruchio’s method of ‘taming’ the rebellious Kate as ingeniously complying with the early modern wife-beating reforms,” argues that *Shrew* “signals a shift toward a ‘modern’ way of managing the subordination of wives by legitimizing domination as long as it is not physical” (274). Detmer, while also expressing an ahistorical, “presentist” argument, *grants* her avowed agenda of being a

feminist reader and teacher and her purpose of examining “domestic violence . . . as one point on a continuum of power and control behaviors” rather than as “using a simple hierarchy of tactics that would automatically see the physical as worse than other kinds of threatening behavior” (294). Just as Crewe can legitimately claim that Venus’s behavior toward Adonis can be viewed as a form of sexual harassment, so too I can legitimately emphasize the erotic humor of the narrative without being accused of reverse-sexism.

On the matter of the length of commentaries, Foakes wisely observes, “. . . entries need to be compact so as not to distract the reader’s attention to the text; they should be on target, so as not to burden the user with unnecessary information; they should be attentive to complexities of meaning and of staging without overloading the text; and they should be convincing without pressing a tendentious single interpretation or bullying the reader” (238). The Oxford and Arden 3 guidelines offer more specific limitations on the length of notes. However, before examining these, let us turn to the comments of Sheldon Zitner and John Pitcher on this subject. In 1984, Zitner contends that editors are annotating excessively and identifies five categories into which most of these seem to fall:

1. parallel passages not required for clarification of the text;
2. refutations of misreadings;
3. negative results, such as evidence of the editor’s unsuccessful attempts to find information, or elaborate grammatical analyses of incomprehensible or ambiguous passages;
4. cross-referencing of repetitions without textual or thematic import;
5. moral or esthetic reflections not required for clarification of the text. (136)

Zitner does concede that “These categories are not exhaustive, and their usefulness is limited since the special features of each occasion for annotation make it impossible to lay down rules, even rules of thumb, for eliminating explanatory notes” (236). On the other hand, John Pitcher, in 1996, asserts that editor should write more notes: “Part of an editor’s duty, as I now see it, is to ensure that readers and audiences don’t forget what was obvious to earlier generations about a Renaissance poem or play or novel—even if this means providing a fuller and more elaborate elucidation of the text than we are accustomed to” (58). Whether one agrees with Foakes, Zitner, or Pitcher, print editions by their nature impose limitations on the length of notes governed by the layout of the text and commentary on the page. The Arden 3 guidelines rightly avow that “the amplitude of its annotation remains one of the principal attractions of the Arden Shakespeare in the eyes of many users,” as is also the case with the Oxford and New Cambridge editions. The Arden 3 guidelines continue,

Notes should always aim at offering elucidation of that which needs it (whether or not it has been usual to supply it). Comment by extended paraphrase, without indication and explanation of the source of difficulty, is to be avoided. At the same time, care should be taken not to include so much commentary that there is no more than a trickle of text on the page. Balance is desirable for many reasons . . . Though notes may include reference to illuminating stage tradition or practice, or critical comment, they should remain notes and not become essays. They should be framed in the briefest and most relevant form compatible with easy comprehension . . . The practice, initiated in Arden 2 Hamlet, of supplying a section devoted to **Longer notes** (LNs) may be considered for matters which have

generated much controversy and which therefore require exposition of conflicting views or a range of evidence, provided the play in question offers enough material to warrant it. Their use should in any event be sparing and editors should consider whether such matters more properly belong in the **Introduction**.

The Oxford guidelines are even more specific: “The Commentary will include the kind of explanatory material which is more conveniently offered as a brief note to a particular passage of the text than discursively. Be succinct but not cryptic. Lengthy notes (i.e. ones of more than about 150 words) should be avoided if possible; when essential they should be placed among the Appendices.”

The Internet Shakespeare Editions (ISE) guidelines identify three levels of commentary:

There will be three levels of annotation and an independent glossary. The first two levels of annotation will be accessed immediately from the modern text; users will choose either to view “basic” or advanced annotation. Basic annotation will be that part of the notes primarily explanatory of meanings, at roughly the level of one of the standard student texts (Bevington, Norton, or Signet, for example); advanced annotation will contain a more complete discussion, roughly equivalent to current annotation in editions like the Arden or New Cambridge . . . The third level will allow you to deal with especially interesting, controversial, or complex material in a discursive additional note. The ready availability of the third level of annotation should make the second level somewhat more concise than in equivalent printed editions. Cross-referencing will be possible from either level.

<<http://web.uvic.ca/shakespeare/Foyer/Guidelines/g-notes.html>>

Clearly, level three annotations are the ISE’s equivalent to the Arden’s “Longer notes” or *The New Cambridge Shakespeare’s* Supplementary Notes. And while true that “The ready availability of the third level of annotation” can “make the second level somewhat more concise than in equivalent printed editions,” commentary to electronic editions, accessible through hyperlinks, present the editor the opportunity, should it arise, to have some level two annotations longer than those limited by the page balance and editorial policy requirements of the Oxford, New Cambridge, or Arden 3.

I now propose, keeping in mind Philip Edward’s sage caution “I know only too well that nothing displays the incompetence of an editor so quickly as his commentary” (103), to offer two of my proposed annotations for *Venus and Adonis*, annotations that are longer than their print equivalents, a luxury resulting from the medium in which I am working.

Line 466 **love]**: *loue* Q1 and subsequent quartos; the 1880-81 Hudson edition of *The complete works of William Shakespeare*, adopts W. S. Walker suggested emendation of *losse* for *loue*, setting editor against editor ever since. In his notes, Pooler (1911) approves of Walker’s conjecture: “Venus is as fortunate in being recalled to life by looks when looks had slain her, as a bankrupt restored to prosperity by his losses”; nevertheless, Pooler retains *love*. Prince (1960) also retains *love*, noting “love\ Walker conjectured ‘loss’. The meaning would then be that as Venus collapses (‘becomes bankrupt’), her very collapse brings her profit, in the attention she receives from Adonis.” John Roe (1992) adopts *loss*, noting “Walker’s sensible conjecture, ‘loss’ for ‘love’ . . . is adopted. (The substitution of the mistaken word could have occurred as the copyist’s or compositor’s eye – or indeed the poet’s own intention – was distracted by the two appearances of ‘love’ in 464.) The contradiction whereby loss promotes recovery consists with the paradoxical logic that prevails throughout.” Burrow (2002) also accepts *loss*, explaining “Walker’s emendation to ‘loss’ is attractive: the tails of the long double ‘s’ in ‘losse’ might have been mistaken for the ascenders of a ‘u’ in ‘loue’. The meaning is that as Venus faints her loss of consciousness brings her the attention of Adonis.” The Oxford/Norton and New Pelican follow Walker, while the Bevington and Riverside retain *love*. As I note in the Introduction, the only universally accepted emendation to the seemly carefully proofread Q1 is *was*

drenched (Q7-11, 13-16) for *had drencht* (Q1-6) in line 1054. Finding no authority for Walker's suggestion in the quartos, I choose to retain *love* in the sense that Venus is the "blessed bankrupt" who collapses as a consequence of the intensity of her love for Adonis.

Line 1095 **song**]: *song* (Q1-13); *sung* (Q14-15); with the exception of the Bevington and Riverside, most modern editors read *sung*. Roe suggests that "Q1's 'song' may have been pronounced 'sung' (see Cercignani, p. 111)". Burrow argues, "Q reads 'song', probably in order to retain at least an eye-rhyme. It was a recognized variant form of 'sung' in the period, which is modernized here". I follow Rollins's 1938 admonition that the Q1 "spelling should be kept (as in KITTREDGE [ed. 1936]) for the rime".

As evident from these proposed examples, I welcome the flexibility of hyperlinked commentary. My justification for retaining *song* in line 1095 is probably twice of what would be acceptable in print, while my annotation of the *loue/losse* is not long enough to merit an ISE level three note, it does, to my mind, deserve the space I am proposing to give it. In conclusion, while my discussion of past misogynistic readings of Venus in my Introduction does not differ from an interpretative choice any editor might make, the freedom of hyperlinked annotations in my electronic edition provide me the opportunity to explore commentary in the length I find appropriate not hindered by the demands of the printed edition.

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